



Maine Medical
Association



**TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
AND
THE MAINE OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION**

In Support Of

LD. 222 An Act to Establish a Take-back and Disposal Program for Firefighting and Fire-suppressing Foam to Which Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Have Been Added

Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Room 216, Cross Building, Augusta, Maine
Wednesday, February 26th, 2025

Good Morning, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Rachel Criswell, and I'm a full-spectrum family physician and environmental health researcher based in Skowhegan. I received my Medical Degree and Masters Degree in Biomedical Research at Columbia University and completed my family medicine residency at the Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency in Augusta. I currently co-lead an NIEHS-funded project assessing PFAS blood levels in sludge-affected communities in central Maine, and I serve as the Local Health Officer and Medical Director of the Fire and Rescue Squads in my town of Mount Vernon. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD. 222 "An Act to Establish a Take-back and Disposal Program for Firefighting and Fire-suppressing Foam to Which Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Have Been Added," on behalf of the Maine Medical Association and the Maine Osteopathic Association.

The Maine Medical Association (MMA) is a professional organization representing more than 4,000 physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine. MMA's mission is to support Maine physicians, advance the quality of medicine in Maine, and promote the health of all Maine people. The Maine Osteopathic Association (MOA) is a professional organization representing more than 1,200 osteopathic physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine whose mission is to serve the Osteopathic profession of the State of Maine through a coordinated effort of professional education, advocacy, and member services in order to ensure the availability of quality osteopathic health care to the people of this State.

This year, the MMA and MOA have joined the Environmental Priorities Coalition because environmental issues are directly connected to public health. As trusted medical professionals, physicians help identify health risks linked to environmental factors, educate communities on these risks, and advocate for policies that support a healthier population. It is clear that what affects the environment affects human health. This may be air and water pollution from fossil fuel-burning power plants and vehicle tailpipes causing lung and heart

disease,¹ or increased temperatures causing heat-related illnesses and increased tick- and mosquito-borne illness.² It may manifest as extreme weather events³ or environmental toxins and plastic pollution causing cancer and endocrine disruption.⁴ We, as physicians, who are sworn to protect the health of our patients, must pay attention to the underlying causes of the illnesses we treat and stand up for policy solutions that reduce these causes.

Indeed, in my practice and those of my central Maine colleagues, screening, monitoring, and advocacy around per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, also known as PFAS or “forever chemicals,” has become a robust part of keeping our population healthy. This is especially true with the 2022 publication of clinical guidelines for testing and medical monitoring for individuals affected by high levels of PFAS exposure by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. This report, endorsed by the 2024 statement from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, clearly delineates the potential lifelong health effects associated with PFAS exposure, including reduced immune system function, kidney cancer, decreased infant and fetal growth, and dyslipidemia.⁵

Maine is experiencing a PFAS crisis from industrial, occupational, and military exposures that are contaminating our environment and threatening public health. I am proud to be a Maine physician because of the active role that the Maine legislature has taken in protecting the health of individuals exposed to high levels of PFAS. In many cases throughout Maine, the legislature has acted to phase out PFAS, including banning the use of firefighting foam containing PFAS.

While this is a good first step in the fight against the PFAS crisis, large quantities of this foam containing PFAS are still being stored at sites all around Maine. These deposits remain a significant threat to public health, as evidenced by the large spill in Brunswick last year. Without a proper take-back and disposal system, these banned PFAS foams may be improperly stored, leading to leaks, groundwater contamination, and long-term exposure risks for firefighters, communities, and ecosystems. For these reasons, the MMA and MOA support LD 222 and the creation of a Take-back and Disposal Program in Maine.

Thank you for considering the thoughts of Maine’s physicians, and we hope you support LD 222.

Thank you,

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¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6794003/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/climate-health/php/effects/vectors.html>

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9013542/>

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9562888/>

⁵ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/26156/PFAS%20Guidance%20Highlights.pdf>;
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/hcp/clinical-overview/index.html>.