DEFEND OUR HEALTH

Solutions for a Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, Defend Our Health
In SUPPORT of LD 500 "LD 500, "An Act to Ensure Access to Safe Drinking Water from Household Wells in Rural Areas by Expanding Testing"
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
April 22, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the vice president of policy and advocacy for Defend Our Health. Defend Our Health's mission is to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes and products that are toxic-free and climate friendly. I am here to testify in support of LD 500, "An Act to Ensure Access to Safe Drinking Water from Household Wells in Rural Areas by Expanding Testing".

We have all heard the stories about wells contaminated by PFAS across the state. The state is continuing to test for PFAS across the state and, to date, has found over 570 contaminated residential wells. This committee has heard several pieces of legislation over the past few years that have dealt with the issue of PFAS contamination of drinking water. Over the past several years we have learned a lot about the PFAS contamination across Maine and the significant health risks associated with exposure to these "forever chemicals" including increased rates of certain types of cancer, fertility issues, and neurodevelopmental issues in children. These toxic chemicals have polluted our farmland and drinking water throughout the state.

Much of the contamination across the state is due to the state-sponsored spreading of PFAS-contaminated sludge on farmland. The good news is that the state is helping cover the cost for some PFAS contaminated residential wells. If the contamination can be tied back to the sludge spreading on nearby farmland, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is helping with the cost of testing and remediation. However, sludge spreading is not the only source of contamination. Other sources of contamination could include AFFF firefighting foam, which can end up in our aquifers during firefighter training or other firefighter maneuvers. Leachate from landfills can pollute groundwater as can effluent being discharged from municipalities and industries across the state. PFAS is ubiquitous and highly mobile, making it easy to contaminate drinking water.

Public water supplies in Maine and those community water sources that service schools and daycares will test and treat for PFAS. But most Maine households do not get their drinking water from public water supplies, but rather from residential wells. Over half of Maine residents get their drinking water from a residential well, the highest percentage in the nation. Residential wells are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, so residents are responsible for the cost of testing and remediation. PFAS testing can be cost prohibitive for many families. The cost ranges from $250-300 for a DEP certified approved test. This is important because of the

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geography of those who are more likely to be impacted. Those who rely on residential wells are more likely to live in rural communities, which have higher poverty rates and lower median incomes than their urban and suburban counterparts. Those who need this testing are the least able to afford it. We need to make sure that everybody relying on residential wells can get their wells tested, regardless of income.

Currently, the state has a program that helps low-income Mainers pay for water testing for arsenic and other contaminants. PFAS is not included on that list of contaminants. LD 500 will require the Department to add PFAS to the list of contaminants it covers the cost of testing for when helping low-income Mainers test their wells. Information from the Department shows that 471 families took advantage of the free testing for arsenic and other contaminants from 2022-2024. The outreach that the Department is doing through WIC and other programs has been incredibly helpful in educating well owners on the importance of well water testing and we appreciate all their hard work. But we do believe that PFAS should be added to the list of contaminants that is being tested. If we estimate based on the numbers from the Department, we are looking at around $63,000 dollars a year for testing. That's rounding up $250 a test for 250 households. Pay for these tests is much more affordable than the healthcare costs associated with PFAS. As an example of healthcare costs, the cost of a PFAS blood serum test average about $600 and not all insurance companies cover that cost. It is money well-spent. If a well tests high for PFAS or any other contaminants, there is a program under the Maine Housing Authority that helps low-income individuals pay for the cost of remediation for contaminated wells. So, if contamination is found, there are resources available to help cover the cost of treatment.

Everyone deserves access to safe drinking water, regardless of income. LD 500 would provide necessary resources to Mainers who may otherwise not be able to afford to test their drinking water. This committee supported similar legislation last session, and we urge the committee to do this same this session and vote "ought to pass" LD 500.

Thank you.