TESTIMONY OF SHARON TREAT IN SUPPORT OF LD 1326,
"AN ACT TO PROTECT THE DRINKING WATER FOR CONSUMERS OF CERTAIN WATER SYSTEMS BY ESTABLISHING MAXIMUM CONTAMINANT LEVELS FOR CERTAIN PERFLUOROALKYL AND POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES"
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
APRIL 22, 2025

Chairs Ingwerson and Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sharon Treat and I live and work in the City of Hallowell. I am here today as a private citizen testifying in support of LD 1326, "An Act to Protect the Drinking Water for Consumers of Certain Water Systems by Establishing Maximum Contaminant Levels for Certain Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances," sponsored by Representative Dan Shagoury.

Like much of the State of Maine, Hallowell has a PFAS problem. Whether from paper mill wastewater discharges, or from sewage sludge spread on farm fields that has leached into ground and surface waters, the Kennebec River is contaminated with PFAS. That contaminated water has seeped into the aquifer where Hallowell's drinking water wells are located.

The most recent testing found PFAS contamination levels higher than the current Maine interim standard of 20 parts per trillion for the sum of 6 PFAS, a level that has been determined by the federal Environmental Protection Agency to be hazardous to human health. Just over a year ago, EPA issued its final National Primary Drinking Water Regulation for six PFAS. Of great significance, for two of those PFAS – PFOA and PFOS – the agency set a Maximum Contaminant Level Goal of ZERO. In other words, the only safe level of exposure to these PFAS is zero.

Because of the difficulty of testing accurately to establish a level of zero and the need to establish an enforceable standard, the final rule set a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) at 4ppt for each of PFOA and PFOS, with 10ppt set for each of PFHxS, PFNA and HPFO-DA (GenX), as well as a hazard standard for mixtures. The rule also required testing and public notice of exceedances of these limits starting in 2027 and compliance with the MCL by 2029.

Maine's interim PFAS drinking water standard of 20ppt was adopted by the Department of Health and Human Services after legislation enacted by emergency resolve in 2021 instructed the Department to do so. At the time, the interim drinking water standard was a huge advance over having no standard at all. Since then, we know much more about the harm of exposure and have EPA's risk assessment and rule.

In its summary of the health impacts of PFAS exposure, the primary route of which is through drinking water, EPA's 2024 rule states:

> "The adverse health effects associated with exposure to such PFAS include (but are not limited to): effects on the liver (*e.g.*, liver cell death), growth and development (*e.g.*, low birth weight), hormone levels, kidney, the immune system (reduced response to vaccines), lipid levels (*e.g.*, high cholesterol), the nervous system, and reproduction, as well as increased risk of certain types of cancer.
>
> Exposure to PFAS may have disproportionate health effects on children. Adverse health effects relevant to children associated with exposure to some PFAS include developmental effects to fetuses during pregnancy or to breast-fed infants, cardiovascular effects, immune effects, endocrine effects, and reproductive effects. Additionally, PFAS are known to be transmitted to the fetus via the placenta and to the newborn, infant, and child via breast milk."[1]

As additional scientific studies are completed, the known scope and seriousness of the harmful health impacts of PFAS continues to expand. For instance, a study by researchers at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California published in January this year found that in counties where drinking water surpassed recommended maximum levels of PFAS, there was a higher incidence of digestive, endocrine, respiratory, and mouth and throat cancers. Increases in incidence ranged from slightly elevated at 2% to substantially elevated at 33% in the case of increased incidence of mouth and throat cancers linked to the compound perfluorobutanesulfonic acid (PFBS).

In addition, the study found that males in counties with contaminated drinking water had a higher incidence of leukemia, as well as cancers of the urinary system, brain and soft tissues, compared to males living in areas with uncontaminated water. Females had a higher incidence of cancers in the thyroid, mouth and throat, and soft tissues. Based on the latest available EPA data, the researchers estimate that PFAS contamination of drinking water contributes to 6,864 cancer cases per year.[2]

It is clear that Maine's 20ppt interim standard needs to be updated. It simply isn't sufficiently protective, especially in a state with widespread PFAS contamination of both residential wells and public drinking water systems, groundwater, lakes and streams.[3]

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[1] https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/26/2024-07773/pfas-national-primary-drinking-water-regulation

[2] Li, S., Oliva, P., Zhang, L. et al. Associations between per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and county-level cancer incidence between 2016 and 2021 and incident cancer burden attributable to PFAS in drinking water in the United States. J Expo Sci Environ Epidemiol (2025). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41370-024-00742-2, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41370-024-00742-2

[3] See, e.g.,a recent study in the journal *Environmental Research* of surface water concentrations of PFAS likely originating wholly or in part from run-off from sludge-spread farm fields found significant levels of PFAS in streams, rivers and lakes in central Maine, including China Lake, a drinking water source, quite distant from where the fields were spread. Gail L. Carlson, Megan Andersen, Tracking environmental contamination from multiple sources of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, Environmental Research, 2025, 121470, ISSN 0013-9351, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2025.121470 (Journal pre-proof accessed online March 28, 2025)

The interim standard is just that, a step in the right direction as we awaited action by EPA. Now that EPA has acted, Maine needs to make sure the more protective standard is complied with and enforceable. Unfortunately, EPA is no longer a reliable partner. For now, the PFAS MCL is still the law, and EPA's website with the scientific studies backing it up is still publicly available. Tomorrow, who knows?

There's a good chance that my drinking water has been contaminated with PFAS the entire time I've lived in Hallowell, since the City shifted to wells in Chelsea in the 1990's. It is only since 2022 when Maine required testing for PFAS that community water system customers throughout the state found out that their water is contaminated. Although the PFAS levels in Hallowell are among the highest in a public water system, we are not alone. Concerningly, some of the highest readings have been in school water supplies, and we know children are particularly vulnerable to harmful health impacts from PFAS.[4]

For the past year, my family has been filling up jugs with treated PFAS-free water at a faucet located at the Hallowell Water District offices and trucking that to our house for drinking and cooking purposes. It's a pain in the neck and not easy, and there are plenty of people in town who are not able to lift and fill heavy water containers at the public faucet, nor can they afford the cost of installing a filtration system. With the federal standard in place, there was a light at the end of this tunnel- the federal requirement that our water comply with the updated health standard by 2029. The water district has been aiming at completing a filtration plant by 2028. Only 2 ½ years to go!!!

Please support LD 1326 to keep us on schedule meeting the federal standard, so that everyone dependent on community water systems has water that is safe to drink.

[4] The most recent database of test results posted on the Drinking Water Program website doesn't include Hallowell's current data showing 20.1ppt PFAS: https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/dwp/cet/documents/PFASallResults.pdf

Proposed amendment to LD 1326 offered by Sharon Treat
April 22, 2025

Sec. 1. 22 MRSA §2650-A is enacted to read:

§2650-A. Drinking water standards, monitoring and treatment for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances

5. Treatment; notice. Beginning January 1, 2029, if a monitoring result confirms the presence of a regulated PFAS contaminant in excess of the maximum contaminant level in subsection 2 or a combination of regulated PFAS contaminants exceeding 20 nanograms per liter in the drinking water of a community water system or nontransient, noncommunity water system, the department shall direct the community water system or nontransient, noncommunity water system to:

A. Implement treatment or another remedy to reduce the level of PFAS or regulated PFAS contaminants in the drinking water to below 20 nanograms per liter; and

B. Issue a notice to all users of the community water system or nontransient, noncommunity water system informing the users of the detected regulated PFAS contaminant concentration and potential risk to public health until the treatment or other remedy in paragraph A is completed and effective. The notice must be mailed to all users and include test results. QR codes or website links do not constitute sufficient notice.