



Solutions for a  
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sergio Cahueque, Organizer, Defend Our Health  
In SUPPORT of LD 2070, "An Act to Prohibit Landfill Expansion into Wetlands"  
Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee  
February 10, 2026

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee: My name is Sergio Cahueque, and I am an organizer with Defend Our Health. Defend works to create a world where all people are healthy and thriving, with equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes, and products that are toxic-free and climate-friendly. Please accept this testimony in support of LD 2070 which would prevent the expansion of solid waste landfills into wetlands.

Wetlands play a vital role in improving water quality, controlling floods, providing habitat, and supporting the overall health and function of the ecosystem. Protecting wetlands can protect our safety and welfare. So, it is essential to recognize their value and take action to preserve these vital areas before they are lost forever.

An expansion of solid waste landfills would do the exact opposite of protecting and preserving wetlands. We know that an important source of PFAS contamination in the environment is landfill leachate. Because PFAS has been in products for decades, and those products end up in landfills, the trash in our landfills is loaded with PFAS. Some of this PFAS rinses off into the leachate that collects at the bottom. Multiple studies nationally and internationally have thoroughly documented that there are high levels of PFAS in landfill leachate.

Leachate is a major environmental hazard. When leachate seeps from landfills, it can contaminate soil and groundwater. This pollution can harm plant and animal life, disrupt ecosystems, and degrade natural habitats. The presence of PFAS in leachate is especially concerning. PFAS are persistent chemicals that do not break down in the environment, leading to long-term contamination.

The health risks associated with leachate are profound. Leachate often contains heavy metals, organic compounds, and other toxic substances that can have serious health effects. PFAS, in particular, have been linked to various health issues, including cancer, liver damage, and developmental problems in children. When leachate contaminates drinking water sources, it poses a direct threat to human health.

Since 2009, the rate of wetland loss has accelerated by 50%. About 80,000 acres of wetland are lost each year, and that's just coastal wetlands. Between 2009 and 2019, the disappearance of all wetlands resulted in a loss equal to the land area of Rhode Island. This is why, in order to protect the destruction and contamination of an important ecosystem and to protect people from further exposure to toxic chemicals in land and water, we urge the committee to vote ought to pass on LD 2070. Thank you.