

Testimony of Edward Pontius, MD, DLFAPA

IN SUPPORT OF LD 226

An Act To Limit the Use of Hydrofluorocarbons To Fight Climate Change

Before the Committee On Environment and Natural Resources: March 15, 2021

Good morning, Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and Committee Members.

I am a physician in Maine and a member of the Maine Association of Psychiatric Physicians and the Maine Medical Association. I am here to speak strongly in favor of LD 226.

Briefly, LD 226 prohibits commercial use of any equipment that contains or uses hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), a class of industrial chemicals introduced commercially in the 1990's. The issue is that these industrial chemicals in commercial use are inevitably released into the atmosphere, where they are extremely potent and long-lived greenhouse gases. Although at present HFCs are only about 1% of total greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, they have an impact on global warming that is hundreds to thousands times greater than that of CO₂ by weight. The planet is already coping with extreme weather and climate events related largely to CO₂ resulting from fossil fuels. Climate change is already the greatest threat to human health in history¹. Unfortunately use of HFCs continues to grow in the US and many parts of the world. Unchecked, HFCs alone could be responsible for an 0.1°C additional rise in global warming by 2050, and 0.5°C rise by 2100². This small number may not seem impressive, but science suggests that a 0.5°C rise alone will lead to substantial rises in heat-wave duration, rainstorm intensity and sea level rise. Coral reefs will be greatly reduced or die off. Traditional agricultural crops will cease to grow in parts of the world, and many regions will lose their water supplies. Direct health consequences for people will include vector-borne diseases appearing in parts of the US and the world never seen before³.

The good news is that Maine can do it's part to eliminate HFCs and their threat to our health. In doing so, Maine will also be contributing to commercialization of newer, more advanced refrigeration technologies that are more efficient- reducing power-related greenhouse gas and also saving Mainer's money on their utility bills⁴.

I ask that you please act to move LD 226 forward.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Ed Pontius MD

¹ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20181218.278288/full/>

² <https://www.ccacoalition.org/ru/slcps/hydrofluorocarbons-hfcs>

³ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41590-020-0648-y>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/f-gas/alternatives_en#:~:text=In%20chillers%2C%20hydrocarbons%20and%20ammonia,is%20available%20on%20the%20market.