

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH
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IN SUPPORT OF LD 780

An act Regarding Uncontrolled Hazardous Substances Sites

Presented by Representative Jessica Fay

Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

Good morning, Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and Members of the Committee. My name is Lani Graham. I am a family practice physician and former Chief Public Health officer for Maine. Currently, I serve on the Public Health Committee for the Maine Medical Association (MMA), and from May 2019 to December 2019, I was honored to represent the Maine Public Health Association (MPHA) working with other stakeholders on a Task Force established to make recommendations to help Maine address the serious contamination by the large chemical family known collectively as PFAS (per- and polyflouroalkyl substances).

While this bill does not specifically reference PFAS, allowing Maine's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to take the action described represents a vital first step in beginning the long and arduous process needed to clean up the damage done, protect the health of Maine people, and prevent further contamination.

As my area of expertise is health, I want to briefly mention that this family of chemicals has already been shown to be associated with potentially very serious adverse health effects, including decreasing: the normal responsiveness of the immune system and a woman's chance of becoming pregnant; and increasing the risk of: thyroid disease, elevated cholesterol levels, and the occurrence of several cancers. ough unaware, are counting on the Maine legislature to' act now. Further delay in addressing what never should have been done in the first place is not an option. It is hard to understand why chemicals whose health impacts

were unknown but whose resistance to break-down, earning them the nickname “forever,” was thoroughly understood, were used so widely.

As a member of the Task Force, I am very aware of how hard all government agencies have worked over the last several years to address Maine’s PFAS problem with woefully insufficient resources and a relatively unresponsive federal government. My hat is off to them. Everything was thought through to determine where risks were highest, with a view to protecting the most vulnerable Maine people. But sadly, there is no way to address this problem without additional authority and funds. This bill offers that opportunity.

In addition, this bill may well help us to avoid future disasters of the same nature. Perhaps if DEP had this authority several years ago when alarms were raised by other jurisdictions, more rapid action would have been feasible.