

The Joint Standing Committee On Environment And Natural Resources

Testimony IN SUPPORT AS AMENDED of

LD 1600 An Act To Investigate Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance Contamination of Land and Groundwater

May 7, 2021

Honorable Chairwoman Senator Stacy Brenner and Honorable Chairman Representative Ralph Tucker; and Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony IN SUPPORT of LD 1600 **An Act To Investigate Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance Contamination of Land and Groundwater as amended.**

My name is Jacquelyn Elliott and I live in Waterboro, Maine. For more than three decades I have been an environmental health and justice advocate. My work began in my native state of New Hampshire and has continued since retiring to Maine in 2010. My efforts have been involved with waste management policy and have included the outcomes and dangers posed from the land spreading of waste treatment sludge promoted as fertilizer for farmland.

As I am sure The Committee is aware, Maine's citizens are facing the dangers of lands and water contaminated with PFAS/PFOS (perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances), forever chemicals that endanger human health. It might not be an over statement to assert that we are facing a crisis. Ground water and drinking wells are polluted with these toxins. Farmers are losing their livelihoods when lands, crops, meat, and dairy products are contaminated and can no longer be marketed.

These toxic chemicals are ubiquitous in our environment and end up in sewage sludge and other processing by-products that are then, without testing, being spread on our lands. Maine landowners were assured of the safety of spreading sewage sludge on their lands as low-cost fertilizer. Now they are facing destitution because polluted lands and water have left them with no way to provide for their living.

This contamination has spread from the farmlands to neighboring families who are facing fears from unknowingly drinking tainted water and eating vegetables grown on contaminated land. Grandparents are distressed by the knowledge their precious grandchildren have been spending summers swimming in pools filled from poisoned wells.

Please see:

<https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/tech/science/environment/pfas/unraveling-a-toxic-nightmare-more-wells-show-forever-chemicals-pfas-in-maine/97-8aeb7dba-9232-443f-b0e5-d1b74a5b3975>

PFAS are a class of chemicals designated as forever toxins because their chemical bonds are very difficult to remediate and break down. Most humans are carrying elevated body burdens of these toxins. They are found in everyday items such as clothing, carpets, furniture, and food packaging. They are used as fire retardants and in fire-fighting foams. They are unnecessary, manufactured toxic chemicals. These forever chemicals are linked to certain cancers, immune and reproductive system disruptions, and endocrine disorders.

Maine at this time is uncertain how prevalent the contamination from these dangerous chemicals is in the state. However, it is obvious, the State has a substantial problem. Currently there is a list of more than 700 sites where sludge has been spread that need testing. That will require funding. There will be need for remediation of contaminated sites that will also require funding. All of this will be expensive and the obligation should not fall on the landowners.

PFAS contamination is a hazard from another prevalent source – landfill leachate that is produced from water draining through decomposing waste, leaching toxic compounds contained in the wastes placed in the landfill. The State-owned, Casella Waste Systems, Inc. managed Juniper Ridge Landfill, disposes sewage sludge – much of it imported. Sludge is also incorporated at the Waste Management Disposal Services of Maine, Inc. Crossroads Landfill as daily cover. In these instances, millions of gallons of the leachate are minimally treated before being discharged into the Penobscot and Kennebec Rivers, respectively. This leachate is not tested for PFAS contamination. PFAS contamination of the rivers places an undue burden on our tribal communities who value these rivers as integral to their culture and sustenance fishing use.

LD 1600 as amended would begin to address these grim realities by providing funding for prioritizing, testing, and remediation of land and waters that are contaminated. The funding would appropriately place the cost on those who are polluting with the land spreading of contaminated sludge.

This legislation would also require that the Department of Environmental Protection set up a program to test landfill leachate for PFAS before it is delivered to a facility for treatment and would additionally establish an allowable level for PFAS and toxic metals by 2024.

This legislation as amended puts in place important first steps to address the dangers posed by PFAS contamination. Sadly, these are end-of-pipe approaches and can only do so much to remediate the damage done. We need to move forward with policies that require polluters to pay for the harm they have caused; remove PFAS from products; eliminate the production of these often-unnecessary chemicals; and require that chemicals produced to replace them are proven safe before they are brought to the market place and widely utilized. These profoundly dangerous chemicals are most certainly an instance where the principles of precaution should be employed.

I ask that The Committee move this legislation as OUGHT TO PASS. Thank you for considering my comments.

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