

Testimony of Gail L. Carlson, Ph.D.

In OPPOSITION to LD 1662 *An Act To Update Maine's Sales Prohibition on Upholstered Furniture Treated with Flame-retardant Chemicals*

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Maine Legislature, Augusta, ME
May 17, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Committee, thank you for reading my testimony. My name is Gail Carlson, and I live in Waterville. I hold a Ph.D. in biochemistry, I teach public health courses at Colby College, and I conduct research on environmental toxic chemical pollution. I am testifying in **opposition** to LD 1662 because Maine should not weaken the major health benefits that come from restricting *all* chemical flame retardants in furniture foam.

Four years ago I testified in front of this committee and also participated in a work session for LD 182, the bill that established the flame retardant ban. When asked directly by a member of your committee if I thought the entire class of halogenated flame retardants ought to be restricted, I answered yes. Both the older chemicals in widespread use at the time and their newer substitutes escape readily from the consumer products to which they are intentionally added, including furniture, are detected in household dust and air samples, build up in our bodies, especially our children's, and are highly toxic. For example, children may be exposed to "chlorinated tris" from furniture at five times the Consumer Product Safety Commission's acceptable daily intake level to prevent cancer.¹ Chlorinated tris causes cellular oxidative stress, which underlies many diseases, and is an endocrine disruptor, linked to reproductive dysfunction and adverse pregnancy outcomes in humans.²

Time and time again, we take the wrong approach to toxic chemical substitutions by using replacements that have similar and often well-known chemical properties and toxicities. Or if data gaps exist, we falsely think that the next halogenated flame retardant will be different and not cause harm. The public continues to be used as human guinea pigs, building up significant body burdens of flame retardants and facing the health consequences. All while these chemicals are not even needed and do not confer the promised fire protection to furniture.³ There is simply no need to use them, and as a class they are highly hazardous.

We cannot and should not approach this problem thinking we can pick out the "safe" chemicals in the bunch or that the next set of halogenated substitutes will be safe for us to be exposed to. Maine took the bold and innovative step four years ago to restrict chemical flame retardants as a class. Science tells us we should stick with that approach. Chemical flame retardants are hazardous, people, especially children and firefighters, are highly exposed, and the health risks are way too high. Please vote *ought not to pass* on LD 1668. Thank you.

¹ <https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/pdfs/ufurn2.pdf>

² <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2020.105946>

³ <http://media.apps.chicagotribune.com/flames/index.html>