

**Testimony of Jason D Beckler– Chief of the Mount Vernon Fire and Rescue Department
In SUPPORT of LD 132 “An Act to Require Health Insurance Carriers to Provide Coverage for Blood
testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances”**

Senator Baily, Congresswoman Perry and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Service Committee. I am Chief Jason D Beckler of the Mount Vernon Fire & Rescue Department. I am writing to testify in support to LD 132 “An Act to Require Health Insurer Carriers to Provide Coverage for Blood testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances.”

I have been serving my local community for the past 25 years. The Mount Vernon Fire Department works closely with mutual aid partners of the Lakes Region Mutual Aid, helping the towns of Vienna, Readfield, Fayette, and Wayne. We also assist other neighboring towns when called upon. During my time of service my fellow firefighters and the people that I serve have been my foremost concern. This is why I have chosen to testify today. Many things have changed throughout the years of my service and we have always strived to create a safer working environment to save lives and property of the people we work with and the people we serve. I view LD 132 has another step to making the unsafe work environment we are expected to work in safer. Allowing firefighters to receive a low cost, insurer covered test for forever chemicals such as PFAS is critical in the early diagnosis for cancers. The fire service as a whole is dwindling. The last thing we can afford is to lose more firefighters to cancer from something that could be detected early and give them a fighting chance.

PFAS chemicals are in the firefighting gear that we must wear in order to perform our job safely. Currently Fire Department turnout gear is treated with PFAS chemicals to help “protect” the firefighters. The science is telling us that the PFAS chemical is being absorbed into the bodies of the people working to save lives and property. While we work to minimize exposure it’s unavoidable, and there is no other option at this time. It just is not available on the market. They have started to create other options but it will be a long time before departments can afford to transition to new gear. To outfit just 10 firefighters in the turnout gear necessary to do the job is nearly \$40,000 today. Rural communities are going to have a difficult time to afford this transition. Assisting firefighters with tests to screen for cancer is a critical step in assisting in saving lives.

As a society, we ask our firefighters to save our lives and our property when disaster strikes. The firefighters that I serve with receive little to no pay and spend their own money just to get to the calls. Is it fair to ask them to pay out of pocket to test for something that is caused by the job? Set aside the fact that in the back of their minds, they are already fighting the odds of becoming sick. Asking firefighters to spend another \$450 to \$600 out of pocket to assess their exposure during a volunteer service that is already costing them money is just another reason for somebody to choose not to do the job at all.

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) maintains a memorial in Colorado Springs for firefighters across the nation who have died as a result of their service. According to the IAFF, almost 75% of the names added to the wall in 2022 (348 out of 469) were firefighters who had died from occupational cancer.

Insurance companies covering with the cost of the PFAS blood serum test will be a win for both the insurance companies and fire and rescue personnel. It would allow early detection and treatment. I believe in the long run the insurance companies would save money while achieving the mission of saving lives. Those of us working for Fire and Rescue services can then focus on the calls for help.

Thank you for your time today

Respectfully Submitted

Chief Jason D Beckler

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