DEFEND OUR HEALTH

Solutions for a Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Adam Nordell – Defend Our Health / Songbird Farm

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, Representative Perry and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. My name is Adam Nordell. I am a PFAS impacted farmer in Unity, ME, where I co-own Songbird Farm with my wife, Johanna Davis. With my farm shut down, I am working as a campaign manager for Defend Our Health. I am testifying in support to LD 132 "An Act to Require Health Insurer Carriers to Provide Coverage for Blood testing for Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances."

Last winter, my wife and I were startled and terrified to learn that our farm soil and well water were severely contaminated with PFAS. Our well water tested about 400 times higher than Maine's drinking water standard of 20 parts per trillion (ppt). Our soil tested as high as 390 parts per billion (ppb) for the chemical PFOS alone - 57 times higher than the state's soil screening standard for grass-based dairies. There are no soil screening standards available for vegetable farms, so I offer this number as a frame of reference – the farm is very contaminated. The discovery has entirely upended our lives; our business is closed and our fields are fallow.

When we discovered the contamination of our farm, we let our customers know that we were suspending sales while we engaged Maine DEP and DACF to conduct soil, water and produce testing to help us understand the extent of the problem. With our very high soil contamination levels, some of our sampled crops showed concerning levels. Surprisingly, some had no detectable contamination. We seemed to have a viable future on our land – we thought we could install a water filter to protect ourselves and restructure our business to produce and sell only those low uptake crops. We might need to take on some off-farm work to make ends meet, but we thought we had a safe and viable future with our farm business.

At the same time, we submitted blood serum samples to assess our family's exposure. It took several months for our sample results to come back. Our levels were astonishingly high. The average US resident has a PFOA blood serum level of 1.4 ppb and a PFOS level of 4.3 ppb. The National Academy of Sciences Engineering and Medicine recently identified a host of illnesses linked including kidney cancer with exposure above 20 parts per billion for a sum of seven PFAS chemicals. My own blood serum tested at 3,547 ppb for a sum of six chemicals – 177 times the elevated risk threshold identified by the National Academies.

The breakdown of individual PFAS levels in my serum correlated dramatically with the cocktail of chemicals present in our soil rather than our drinking water, suggesting that our highest exposure was coming from the ground. As a farming family, this was terrifying information to receive. A water filter alone was not going to keep us safe. The land itself was poisoning us.

It was also empowering, actionable information. I know that I have an elevated risk for certain diseases and the National Academy report gives my primary care doctor the guidance to regularly screen for them. And I know that I need to limit my family's continued exposure to these chemicals. Without access to the PFAS blood serum test, my family would likely still be adding to our staggeringly high PFAS levels through an unidentified, soil-based exposure. Because we know our risks, we are able to limit them and do everything possible to protect ourselves and our young son.

I recently went in for a one year, follow-up blood serum test as recommended by the National Academies of Sciences report. After a year avoiding contaminated water and PFAS laden dust, my levels have dropped by about a quarter. If my remaining level continues to drop by 25% each year, I have about twenty years to go to get below the National Academies' 20 ppb threshold. I have a lot of elevated medical risk before I get there. But I know that I'm doing what I can to protect myself and my family going forward.

The Affordable Care Act mandates that all insurers pay for a list of ten essential health benefits, including lab screenings and preventative procedures. This means that the insurer must pay the full cost of the procedure before the patient's deductible has been met. The PFAS blood serum test is certainly a lab screening and should be understood as a preventative procedure since it allows patients to identify and mitigate high-level, ongoing exposure and helps guide clinicians towards the early identification and treatment of linked illnesses. Treating PFAS linked illnesses sooner than later is in the interest of the patient, but it will save everyone money in the long term – including the insurance companies.

Without the help of insurance coverage, the PFAS blood serum test costs between $450 and $600. That out of pocket cost is currently preventing Maine residents who have an identified high risk of exposure from accessing the test. Without this information, they are unable to protect themselves. My experience with PFAS has been enormously disempowering. My business is shuddered, my family's life completely uprooted, and our health potentially compromised. But the PFAS blood serum test gives PFAS impacted Mainers the tools to protect ourselves from additional high-level exposure. And it gives us a head-start to identify and treat any PFAS linked illnesses that crop up.

Early detection saves lives. This is something that everyone deserves access to.

I urge you to unanimously pass LD 132. Thank you for your time.

Adam Nordell

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