



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Health and Human Services
From: Hunter Smith, Sierra Club Maine
Date: February 9, 2021
Re: Testimony In Favor of LD 164

Senator Gratwick, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. I am writing as a representative of Sierra Club Maine's over 22,000 members and supporters. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we defend everyone's right to a healthy world. In pursuit of that mission we strongly suggest that you pass an amended LD164 and adopt the testing language in Representative Pluecker's upcoming bill.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) substances have been linked to various health issues including increased risks of certain cancers, liver and kidney damage, increased risk of thyroid disease, and decreased fertility. These chemicals are stable in maternal serum, with a half life of up to eight years. They may be transferred through the placenta or breast milk, with health implications for fetuses and infants. PFAS can cause pregnancy complications, lower birth weights, and decreased effectiveness of childhood vaccines.

PFAS are often referred to as "forever chemicals." Many of them do not break down in the environment, requiring cleanup for their removal. These cleanup costs usually fall on municipalities, which are already facing budget concerns from the current pandemic. Contaminating water and soil across the state, PFAS harm our environment, and contaminate our farmland and drinking water. They also can cause a variety of health issues in our wildlife.



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Despite the existence of safer alternatives for most of these uses, PFAS persist in certain manufacturing processes, food packaging, fire-fighting foams, and a variety of other products. The economic and health impacts disproportionately affect low income communities, communities of color, tribal communities, and rural communities.

While LD 129 recognizes the necessity of testing for and limiting PFAS in Maine water systems, it neglects to immediately set a maximum contaminant level (MCL). The deadline for this level to be set is 2024 and, after those 2 years, the Department could still set the MCL at the EPA's outdated health advisory level of 70 parts per trillion. Top scientists have stated that 70 ppt is not health protective and most of our northern New England neighbors have set much lower standards. I appreciate the MCL of 20 ppt that would be set for two PFAS in a proposed amendment, but this level needs to be set for all PFAS as it is in our neighboring states. Mainers should not be drinking water that would be considered contaminated in New Hampshire, Vermont, or Massachusetts.

On behalf of Sierra Club Maine, I urge you to support an amended LD 164. We need to get these toxic chemicals out of our drinking water. LD 164 would set maximum contaminant levels at 20 nanograms per liter for six common PFAS following the lead of Vermont and Massachusetts. This is much more health-protective for our families. However, while LD 164 does set better drinking water standards, we believe that an important component of dealing with the issue of PFAS contamination is identifying where current contamination exists. That is why the committee should consider an amendment to this bill that would require testing as included in Rep. Pluecker's upcoming PFAS MCL bill, which will be before the committee at a later date.

We hope you vote ought to pass for LD 164.

Hunter Smith
Sierra Club Maine
Legislative Team