



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Director of Advocacy, Defend Our Health
In SUPPORT of LD 1427, “An Act To Reduce Poisoning from Radon, Arsenic and Other Air or
Water Pollutants by Expanding Education, Testing and Mitigation
Regarding Those Pollutants”
Before the Health and Human Services Committee
April 20, 2021

Good Morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the director of advocacy for Defend Our Health, formerly the Environmental Health Strategy Center. Defend Our Health’s mission is to make sure that everyone has equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes and products that are toxic-free and climate friendly. I am here to testify in support of LD 1437, “An Act To Reduce Poisoning from Radon, Arsenic and Other Air or Water Pollutants by Expanding Education, Testing and Mitigation Regarding Those Pollutants”

Making sure that all Mainers have access to safe drinking water and healthy homes are core missions of Defend Our Health. Exposure to arsenic is still a serious issue in Maine. Arsenic causes a whole host of health issues including bladder, skin and lung cancer. Maine’s bladder cancer rate is 20% higher than the rest of the nation¹. Like its cousin lead, arsenic also harms children’s brains. A 2014 study in Maine showed that children with even moderate levels of arsenic - those lower than the current standard - had a decline of average IQ scores, 5 to 6 points lower than their peers drinking clean water².

Over 50% of Mainers get their drinking water from residential wells³. A higher proportion of Mainers get their water from wells than any other state in the nation. Due to Maine’s unique geology, there are areas with high levels of naturally occurring arsenic in the bedrock. Considering the health impacts from arsenic and other toxic contaminants such as radon, it is important that those that get their drinking water from residential wells know what is in their drinking water. This legislation would help provide educational materials to individuals who get their drinking water from wells. Additionally, it would allow funding from the Maine Energy, Housing and Economic Recovery Program and from the Housing Opportunities for Maine Program to be used to help pay for the cost of any treatment or remediation. The cost of remediation can run upwards of 3-5,000 dollars, sometimes more. Many families cannot afford this. Allowing access to fund from the two programs mentioned could help many Maine families access safe drinking water.

¹ Baris, D., Waddell, R., Beane Freeman, L. E., Schwenn, M., Colt, J. S., Ayotte, J. D., ... Silverman, D. T. (2016, May 2). Elevated Bladder Cancer in Northern New England: The Role of Drinking Water and Arsenic. Retrieved March 25, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27140955>

² Children Exposed to Arsenic in Well Water Have Lower IQ Scores. (2014, April 22). Retrieved March 25, 2020, from <https://news.columbia.edu/news/children-exposed-arsenic-well-water-have-lower-iq-scores>

³ Maine Center for Disease Control. (2021, March). Maine Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) Network - Public Data Portal - IBM Cognos Viewer. <https://tinyurl.com/5h28w2bz>



This legislation would also require that residential properties be tested for arsenic, radon and uranium before sale. Individuals buying homes have the right to know if the home they are buying has these dangerous contaminants. Requiring this information will help homebuyers make an informed decision about the property they are looking to buy.

While we are in support of this legislation, we would suggest amending the requirements for the testing of water at time of sale so that the radon, arsenic, and uranium requirements only apply to homes with a private well. Public water supplies are already tested for these contaminants. However, we encourage maintaining a requirement for radon in air to be tested in all properties. Additionally, we believe that the bill should be amended to expand the requirement for well water testing to be everything recommended by the department in accordance with 22 MRS 2660-T, not just radon, arsenic and uranium. This would include not only the specific substances referenced in this bill, but also a number of other analytes the Maine CDC recommends all wells be tested for on a regular basis. The cost differential is minimal and it is the best practice to test for the recommended suite of contaminants when testing drinking water.

We urge the committee to vote unanimously “ought to pass” with the amended language as suggested on LD 1437.