



Troy D. Jackson
President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
130th Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony in Support of LD 213
An Act To Require Coverage for Female Firefighters Facing Reproductive System Cancer

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

My name is Troy Jackson and I have the honor of serving as the President of the Maine Senate and of representing northern Aroostook County. I am here today to lend my full support to LD 213, An Act To Require Coverage for Female Firefighters Facing reproductive System Cancer.

Twelve years ago, as Senate Chair of this Labor Committee, I was privileged to hear [LD 621, An Act Allowing Workers' Compensation Benefits for Firefighters Who Contract Cancer](#). The bill gave Maine firefighters, who risked their lives for their communities, a rebuttable presumption that if they contracted cancer, it was likely due to carcinogens they were exposed to on the job. The focus of the testimony was on the toxins released due to the fire itself and combustibles consumed in the flame.

The goal was to ensure our brave firefighters could get the health coverage they deserve, particularly for health conditions they developed due to the dangerous nature of their job.

Since the Maine Legislature passed the original bill in 2009, we have learned a lot about other toxins firefighters come in contact with as part of their job. Firefighters use fluorinated foam while training and battling fires. This foam (Aqueous Film Forming Foam - AFFF) is in the PFAS family. The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has found that humans who are exposed to PFAS have increased cholesterol levels; increased risk of thyroid disease; decreased fertility in women; increased risk of high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia in pregnant women; lower infant birth weights; and an increased risk of kidney cancer and testicular cancer.¹ Now, we believe it is more than necessary to add "gynecologic cancer" to the definition of cancers protected by this presumption. It's just the right thing to do.

As you know, the way presumption laws work is that they assume a disease is linked to a specific occupation. This means the insurance company or employer must prove that the disease is not linked to the job, otherwise, it's assumed. Still, Maine law includes a number of hurdles that firefighters must

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/pfastaskforce/materials/report/PFAS-Task-Force-Report-FINAL-Jan2020.pdf>

overcome when diagnosed with certain cancers: the firefighters must have had a previous medical test during their employment that indicated they were free from cancer; the firefighters must have been employed as firefighters for 5 years and regularly responded to fire calls; the firefighters must sign a written affidavit declaring the diagnosed cancer is not prevalent in their families; and if a retired firefighter, the diagnosis must be obtained within 10 years of retirement or before 70 years of age. To me, it seems a lot to ask when the science already shows that firefighters face an increased risk of cancer.

It is well documented that firefighters have an increased cancer risk due to their occupational exposure to the toxic products of combustion and other hazardous substances. "Cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and infectious disease are among the leading causes of death and disability for firefighters, and numerous studies have found that these illnesses are occupational hazards of the job."² This is recognized by the 46 states that have enacted similar presumptive disability laws.³ Unfortunately, women are not often included in most studies of firefighters' health.⁴ Nonetheless, based on those few studies in which women are included, women firefighters' overall cancer incidence is elevated. The United States Fire Administration conducted a report with links to two studies that found female firefighters might be at an increased risk for breast, cervical, thyroid, and bladder cancers.⁵ At this time, these findings are preliminary due to the small sample size. Yet, women firefighters are at equal or increased risk because "some of the known carcinogens that firefighters routinely encounter, including endocrine-disrupting chemicals, may affect women differently."⁶ It's clear to me that our state laws need to be updated to better protect and care for female firefighters who put themselves at risk to keep ups all safe.

This is a matter of equity. The brave women who risk their very lives deserve this protection. They should not be punished because of the lack of testing of female firefighters. You may hear that this will come at an extraordinary cost to employers and municipalities, but an honest look at the situation tells a different tale. According to Michael Crouse, President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine, of the over 1000 professional firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics his organization represents, only 108 of them are female. This is certainly a situation where the risks outweigh the costs.

In closing, thank you for your time and attention. I will attempt to answer any questions you may have, although there will be others who follow me who are better suited. Please support LD 213 to help ensure that women firefighters have the protection they need.

² www.iaff.org/legislative-issues/federal-presumptive/#:~:text=Summary%3A%20The%20Federal%20Firefighters%20Fairness,workers'%20compensation%20and%20disability%20retirement.

³ www.iaff.org/legislative-issues/federal-presumptive/#:~:text=Summary%3A%20The%20Federal%20Firefighters%20Fairness,workers'%20compensation%20and%20disability%20retirement.

⁴ www.bcpp.org/resource/firefighters/

⁵ www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/emerging_health_safety_issues_women_fire_service.pdf

⁶ www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/emerging_health_safety_issues_women_fire_service.pdf