

130th Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Testimony of Erik C. Jorgensen, MaineHousing, in favor of

LD 463 An Act to Better House Maine Residents
Proposed Revised Title: An Act To Provide Funding for
Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Testing

5 May 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Erik Jorgensen, Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing).

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. MaineHousing is an independent state authority created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first-time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

I am testifying in support of LD 463 in its amended form. We would, however, like to suggest that this funding and program would likely be more effective if it were housed in a public health agency or another office of state government more directly involved in the PFAS/PFOA issue, instead of MaineHousing.

While we do provide remediation funding for certain water contaminants, like arsenic, we do that work in response to water tests that have already taken place. We would prefer to see this work conducted by an agency that already does or has access to this type of testing. The final report of the PFAS task force from 2020 indicates that the Maine CDC, the Maine DEP and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry are all actively working on the PFAS/PFOA issue. While MaineHousing could probably jump in and organize such a grant

program, we feel that it would be better and more efficient for the program to come out of an agency that has already gained expertise in this subject.

Like others in this state, we see the issue of contamination by these chemicals as a tragic environmental catastrophe that continues to deepen as more is learned about the extent of contamination. Others who are testifying today will surely provide better technical context on this issue, but we would agree that this is a critical statewide problem that has the potential to touch almost anyone with a private well. There is urgency here, and we believe that efforts to combat this pollution should be coordinated so the response can be comprehensive and unified rather than having yet one more agency manage a different part of it.

We look forward to working with the sponsor and others in state government to determine how best to deploy resources in the most efficient and effective way. We appreciate Representative Sylvester for bringing this critical issue forward.