



June 21st, 2023

Thank you to the Chairs and Members of the Joint Committee on Public Health for hearing my testimony.

I am Dr. Brita Lundberg, Chair of the Board at Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility, testifying in support of H.2197/S.1356: An Act to protect Massachusetts public health from PFAS.

GBPSR is a group of nationally-recognized experts in public health, cancer epidemiology, occupational medicine, and environmental health. Through our seminal reports on environmental health threats, including [In Harms Way](#), the [Pediatric Environmental Toolkit](#), and [Environmental Threats to Healthy Aging](#), and in collaboration with government entities including the EPA and ATSDR as well as community allies, GBPSR has worked to raise awareness among the medical community and the general public regarding the threats to human health posed by chemicals like PFAS.

Health Consequences of PFAS

PFAS is the "lead" of our time. Like lead, the health harms associated with PFAS are broad and range from links to reproductive, metabolic and neurodevelopmental diseases to cancer. Epidemiologists at several academic institutions, including Harvard and Northeastern, have raised concerns about this issue; so has the [National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine](#).

The scientific community has known for decades that PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances also known as "forever chemicals," pose risks to human health. An article published in the [New England Journal](#) last month describes these risks:

"Epidemiologic and toxicologic studies have linked PFAS to some cancers, elevated cholesterol, impaired vaccine response, thyroid dysfunction, liver disease, reduced birth weight, and premature death, with **no level of exposure being considered safe**.³ Particularly concerning are the health effects of exposure that occurs during gestation or early childhood, which may not manifest until years later and can include... lower bone mass and cardiometabolic disease."

Economic Costs of mitigation of PFAS water contamination and negative health impacts

PFAS contamination is a VERY costly issue for communities: Cambridge, for example, last year spent two million dollars *a month* to source its water from MWRA while it installed filters for PFAS due to elevated levels. Hyannis, which had the highest PFAS levels in the state, spent \$10 million on a filtration system; Barnstable installed one for \$20 million.

Yet the cost of water filtration is dwarfed by the costs of the health consequences of PFAS. The economic costs of the health sequelae in the US, researchers from NYU estimate, range from [5.5-63 billion dollars annually](#).

PFAS are ubiquitous: soil, water and air contamination affects hundreds of communities across Massachusetts. Some, like Nantucket, Westminister, Hyannis and Cambridge have been disproportionately affected. Addressing the issue using the systematic public health approach outlined in this important legislation--through education, mitigation, prevention and advocacy--will benefit **all** communities across the Commonwealth.

Communities can't shoulder the cost of addressing PFAS water contamination alone. Last year, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) testified to the specific need for funding for testing and remodeling private wells. The DEP said that while they are increasing their PFAS budget, stronger legislation is required to address this.

Massachusetts a leader in public health and health equity

Massachusetts was a leader on lead regulation throughout the 1970s and 80s; leadership on PFAS is called for now. Just as lead was a ubiquitous problem, so it is with PFAS. A robust response to the PFAS health threat has the potential to be as much of a public health success story as lead, where banning leaded gasoline, for example, resulted in a gratifying marked increase in children's IQ, among other benefits. A ban on PFAS would likely result in similar substantial improvements in health.

PFAS also poses a crucial equity issue. While both wealthy and low -income communities are affected, wealthy communities can afford the high cost of mitigation while low-income communities cannot. Thus, the health harms of PFAS are expected to exacerbate existing health disparities.

Massachusetts can play a leadership role by beginning to address this global problem by banning nonessential PFAS production as well as imports and exports of nonessential PFAS containing products in this state. Several U.S. medical societies, including the Massachusetts Medical Society, and state legislatures have already called for a ban on non-essential PFAS chemicals.

We salute the Massachusetts legislature for your leadership to safeguard health, promote social justice, and protect our common home, [as other states have done](#), by:

- Banning non-essential PFAS use in Massachusetts;
- Regulating PFAS as a class;

- Establishing a fund for drinking water remediation;
- Requiring the Department of Environmental Protection, (DEP) to restrict industry discharges of PFAS to groundwater and surface water;
- Requiring quarterly monitoring and reporting of PFAS
- Engaging in critical public outreach program on the dangers of PFAS
- Investing in the AG the authority to enforce violations of PFAS laws.

PFAS chemicals represent a costly public health and health equity issue and an appropriate one for our state legislature to address. Increased public education around this issue is critical and advocacy for more stringent regulations on PFAS containing products, as other states have put in place, is indicated. Regulating PFAS as a class would better mitigate these many health effects since they derive from many different PFAS, not just the legacy ones targeted by EPA. Stronger policy would also help ensure that the companies responsible for the pollution would bear the cost of clean up.

Legislative action on PFAS is justified and urgently needed given the tremendous health and economic costs of this issue. The familial, societal and economic costs are immense, and the disabilities can be life-long.

I urge you to support the above legislation, to protect health and because decreasing toxic exposures will increase the ability of those who live and work in the Commonwealth to contribute to society and live meaningful, rewarding lives.

Sincerely,



Brita E. Lundberg, M.D.
of the Board, Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility

Chair

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Enhancing Regulations to Reduce Exposure to PFAS — Federal Action on “Forever Chemicals”

Joseph M. Braun, Ph.D., R.N., M.S.P.H
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Comprehensive reference on the products, and categories of products, that contain PFAS:
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Outside the Safe Operating Space of a New Planetary Boundary for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Ian T. Cousins, Jana H. Johansson, Matthew E. Salter, Bo Sha, and Martin Scheringer

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