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Testimony and Letter in Support of HB 171

April 26, 2021

Dear Chair Patkotak and Members of the House Resources Committee:

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB 171. My name is Pamela Miller and I am a Senior Scientist and Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. I was recently appointed to the National Academy of Sciences as a community liaison to develop guidance on PFAS testing and health outcomes.

The health and safety of our water is critical for Alaskans. HB 171 would require greater protections for communities in preventing and addressing PFAS contamination, including setting of enforceable drinking water standards for a number of PFAS as well as requirements for polluters to pay for safe drinking water and blood tests for people affected by PFAS contamination.

In Alaska, the dispersive use of PFAS-based industrial firefighting foams on military bases and airports has contaminated the drinking water of communities from the North Slope to southeast Alaska. PFAS have been found at over 100 individual sites in nearly 30 locations across Alaska. At least ten Alaska communities have PFAS in their drinking water at levels deemed unsafe by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and it is likely that the number of communities with contaminated water will grow as more sampling is conducted throughout the state.

PFAS are contaminating groundwater and surface waters, fish, wild game, garden produce and backyard chickens in Alaska. Several Alaska lakes are now closed to fishing as a result of PFAS contamination and yet there is no cohesive plan for testing of waters, produce, or fish and wildlife in areas affected by PFAS. The public water supply in Fairbanks and hundreds of private wells in the Fairbanks North Star Borough are contaminated with PFAS. In 2019, Golden Heart Utilities in Fairbanks suspended all sales of its compost that has been sold annually for many years to local farmers and gardeners due to PFAS contaminants in the compost stockpiles. Recently, residents near Sand Lake in Anchorage are calling for testing of residential wells and

lakes in the vicinity of the former Kulis Air National Guard Base where high levels of PFAS have been found.

PFAS are a complex group of nearly 5,000 synthetic chemicals used in industrial applications such as firefighting foams and in household products including non-stick pots and pans, and for stain and water resistance in apparel, carpets, furniture, personal care products, and in food packaging. PFAS chemicals are highly persistent and toxic at exceedingly low levels of exposure. PFAS have been linked with harmful health effects including immune suppression, decreased fertility, kidney and testicular cancer, increased risk of high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia, and increased risk of thyroid disease. PFAS can reduce the effectiveness of certain vaccines. Scientists have expressed concern that PFAS exposure weakens the immune system, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to suffer worse outcomes from COVID-19.

While the science tells us that PFAS are dangerous to human health, there are no enforceable drinking water or food safety standards either at the state or federal level. The latest peer-reviewed science indicates that drinking water standards should be 700 times lower than the guidance level of 70 ppt set by the Environmental Protection Agency. This is dismaying and dangerous especially as the world grapples with a global pandemic.

I urge you to please pass HB 171. Actions to address PFAS contamination in Alaska are long overdue. Although it does not accomplish everything that we would like to see in comprehensive PFAS legislation and we would like to see it strengthened, HB 171 is a significant step in the right direction. We are calling on state legislators to support and pass HB 171 and SB 121 this session as an urgent matter to protect the water and health of Alaskans.

Thank you for your consideration.