

Testimony on S.295 Bradley Reed President, Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont

Good afternoon, my name is Bradley Reed, I am the President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont. We represent 250 paid professional union firefighters, EMT's and paramedics. Our members provide professional fire and emergency medical services to the cities of Burlington, South Burlington, Williston, Montpelier, Barre Town, St. Johnsbury, Rutland, Hartford, Springfield, and Brattleboro. As you are all aware, our members are exposed to carcinogens on a daily basis as part of their job. We were proud to work closely with the Vermont legislature in 2007 to address the cancer epidemic in our occupation when you created workers' compensation benefits to treat our firefighters who are stricken with occupational cancer. We appreciate your continued work to address this important topic through S.295 which regulates the use of class B firefighting foam, and personal protective clothing (PPE) containing PFAS.

Statistics from a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health report shows that firefighters are more likely than the general public to be diagnosed with cancer and even more likely to die from cancer. The International Association of Fire Fighters reported last year, that since 2002, 61% of firefighters deaths in the line of duty were caused by cancer, and in 2016, 70% of firefighter deaths were as a result of cancer. Without a doubt, cancer has become a very big problem in the fire service, and our policies and procedures are constantly evolving to address these challenges. Our members are crawling into a toxic soup of smoke, superheated gases, carcinogenic toxins, asphyxiants and chemicals that most of us are unable to pronounce every time they respond to a fire.

My fire service life began in 1995. At that time, it was unheard of to clean your PPE because there was no such thing as a spare set of gear. When you returned from a fire we would brush off the heavy debris with a broom, and hang your coat and pants near a radiator to dry. When the bell was struck again, you would put on your contaminated gear and go to the next call. During rehabilitation at the fire scene we did not have resources to clean our hands so you would take your hands out of your gloves, black with soot and burned debris, eat a sandwich, drink a coffee and go back to work. It was not until a couple of decades ago that we finally started making the connection between cancer and firefighting. Today that connection is widely known and recognized. In fact, in 2018 the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2018 was

signed into law creating a voluntary federal registry developed and maintained by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). It seems to me, if there are tools and equipment we use on a daily basis that have PFAS in their composition, then regulating its usage and exposure is one more way we can reduce risk.

I wanted to comment specifically on the class B foam portion of the bill because there may be some questions about the safety and effectiveness of alternative products. There are alternative products on the market that perform in a manner consistent with the needs of firefighters combating class B fuel spills and flammable liquid fires, and recent actions by the federal government support efforts to transition away from AFFF to non-fluoridated foams if they so choose. Additionally, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 bans use of fire fighting foam containing PFAS after October 1, 2024, with limited exceptions. Use of such foam for training and any purpose other than putting out fires is banned immediately.

The issue of PFAS in our PPE is a rather new discovery and studies are ongoing to examine the extent to which these chemicals are used in our firefighting gear. To the extent we are able to identify that there is some level of PFAS in our PPE is of great concern as this equipment is worn on our bodies on a daily basis. When this clothing is worn in a hostile work environment that includes extremely hot temperatures and convected heat currents of toxic smoke, our bodies sweat, our pores open and absorption of chemicals becomes easier. So it is important to ensure the clothing our members wear is protecting them while they perform their work, and does not become a source for introducing more carcinogenic materials.

In closing, we would like to thank you again for your work to address the health of our firefighters, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S.295. I would be happy to answer any questions.