

David DiBiase – Written Testimony H.238

My name is David DiBiase and I am the Chief of the City of Vergennes Fire Department as well as the 2nd Vice President of the Vermont State Firefighters Association. I am here today to represent the concerns of the Volunteers regarding the language presented in H.238 requiring the phase out of PFAS in fire gear. I would like to ensure that the volunteers are absolutely not against the phase out of PFAS in our gear and we work daily to protect our members. The concerns as a volunteer fire chief are that there is conflicting information and research around the longevity, cost and effectiveness of gear that is PFAS free.

As volunteers who represent a vast majority of both the state of Vermont and the country most of these departments work off from fundraised budgets with minimal municipal support and for those that do have municipal support, the cost of keeping the doors open and the lights on is already pushing some groups to the edge. The current requirement for fire gear is replacement every 10 years and even in a department such as Vergennes, who is generally well funded, meeting that goal is already difficult. The price of a set of Fire gear without helmet, hood, gloves or boots is already over \$3,600 a set. We only ask for more time to understand the research and let the manufacturers catch up with science. The defunding of the federal agencies that oversee some of these testing and qualifying the science the normal scientific process of verifying these results has been skewed and left unfinished. Further there is no reason a department can't move towards purchasing PFAS free gear today if they otherwise feel as though their expectations and requirements for science has been met, but to make it a requirement with a timetable seems to be an overreach at this point.

We support the idea of notification of gear containing PFAS products, our gear supplier already does that on their invoices, so it is not a big hurdle there, I am sure. The suggestion would be not to put a timeframe on the implementation of requiring PFAS free until such time as the science and industry has agreed on the implementation and approach. Perhaps a study through the Division of Fire Safety regarding the cause and effect of this legislation would be a prudent step forward in the off session.

Thank you for your time and consideration.