Oral Testimony In Support of H.2450/S.1504 and H.2369/S.1548
Presented by Oami Amarasingham, MPHA Deputy Director
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Good morning Chair Decker, Chair Driscoll, and members of the public health committee. My name is Oami Amarasingham and I am the deputy director of the Massachusetts Public Health Alliance. MPHA is a catalyst for community-driven policy change that fosters the conditions for people to achieve their full health potential where they live, work, and play. Through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building, MPHA continues to champion environmental policies that aim to prevent and reduce poor health outcomes.

Put simply, you cannot be healthy if the air you breathe and the water you drink is toxic, and that is why we support two bills in front of you today to address outdoor air quality and PFAS.

Reducing exposure to air pollutants will reduce the numerous health impacts associated with air pollution, which are disproportionately concentrated in communities of color in Massachusetts. Air pollution is associated with many serious health impacts including lung cancer, kidney cancer, asthma, cardiovascular disease, fetal growth and preterm birth, stroke, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, seizures, heart attack, hypertension, behavioral problems, and cognitive impairment. Outdoor air pollution has many sources including particulates and emissions from cars, trucks, waste incinerators, power plants, industrial facilities, fuel storage facilities, landfills, and more. While poor air quality impacts everyone, we know that certain communities, particularly gateway cities, communities of color, and low-income communities, are more exposed and thus experience greater health problems like asthma and cancers. Statewide monitoring and data collection will allow for targeted interventions that improve health outcomes on a broad scale.

Similarly, PFAS, are highly toxic chemicals that pose a very real threat to every resident of the Commonwealth. PFAS are extremely toxic to humans, with research linking PFAS exposure to immunosuppression, liver impacts, high cholesterol, kidney damage, endocrine disruption, reduced fertility, lower birth weight, altered mammary gland development, and several cancers, including testicular, prostate, and kidney cancer,

among others.[1] PFAS have extensively contaminated the environment since their synthesis in the late 1930s.[2] Their reach has become so influential, in fact, that PFAS have been found in the blood of 97-99% of Americans who have been tested.[3] Due to their chemical structure and bio-accumulative properties, PFAS never fully break down. This means that once a person is exposed to PFAS, the chemical resides in their body indefinitely. Similarly, PFAS exposure to the environment is extremely enduring with no known disposal methods to date. Due to this environmental persistence, PFAS have been colloquially deemed "forever chemicals."[4]

PFAS have become highly prolific in industrial and consumer manufacturing. The frequent utilization of PFAS in manufacturing introduces the chemicals to the environment through numerous means, including landfill disposal, septic systems, and wastewater treatment plant effluent.[5] These pathways lead to the persistent contamination of groundwater, surface water and, most toxically, drinking water. Some of the most common household items featuring PFAS include food packaging, furniture textiles and carpets, clothing, personal care products, children's products, building materials, medical supplies and devices, and firefighting foam. PFAS have become so prevalent that they have even been found in breast milk and umbilical cord tissue.[6]

Individual lifestyle choices cannot protect Massachusetts residents from cancer causing pollutants and chemicals in the air, water, and soil. Both of these bills propose a coordinated, statewide approach to protect residents from harmful pollutants and chemicals. We urge swift and favorable reports on both bills.

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[1] Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, *Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) and Your Health.* Available at https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/index.html.

[2] Brennan et al., *Trends in the Regulation of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS): A Scoping Review.* Available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8536021/#:~:text=Since%20their%20invention%20in%20the,aerospace%20technologies%20and%20consumer%20products.

[3] National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, *Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS).* Available at https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/pfc/index.cfm#footnote1.

[4] Clean Water Action, *PFAS: The Forever Chemicals.* Available at https://www.cleanwateraction.org/sites/default/files/MA_FactSheet_PFAS_04.14.20a.pdf.

[5] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Final Report of the PFAS Interagency Task Force.* Available at https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/556/Documents.

[6] Environmental Working Group, *Pregnant with PFAS: The threat of 'forever chemicals' in cord blood.* Available at https://www.ewg.org/news-insights/news/2022/09/pregnant-pfas-threat-forever-chemicals-cord-blood.