



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Safety & Homeland Security
In support of H.3661 An Act relative to the reduction of certain toxic chemicals in firefighter personal
protective equipment
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) has long supported toxic chemical regulation as part of its support for legislation that results in the maximum protection of public health and the environment.

These chemicals, perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), were banned from manufacture in the United States in 2015, but they are still incorporated into certain equipment, for purposes of passing fire retardant tests. It is now established that firefighters' cancer rates in the Boston area are 2.5 times higher than for other residents. In addition to banning toxic chemicals in the materials in a building (H.3500/S.1230), the firefighter's own equipment needs to be free of PFAS.

This bill bans any importation into Massachusetts or sale of any items of equipment to firefighters and fire departments that contain these now-prohibited substances. This is done in two stages. Beginning in January 2020, any seller must notify the purchasing department/town government that a product contains PFAS. Beginning in January 2022, any sales of equipment containing PFAS to firefighters are fully banned, although a penalty is not stated.

These "flame retardants" are now linked to cancer, nervous system damage, decreased fertility, and other health problems, and, ironically, have been shown to be ineffective at stopping fires. This fact was dramatically revealed by a 2012 Chicago Tribune investigative series that ultimately prompted a new California fire safety standard. The HBO documentary "Toxic Hot Seat" gives a compelling account of how toxic flame retardants became so prevalent and documents firefighters speaking out about the high rates of cancer from their exposure to these toxic chemicals while fighting fires. These chemicals have been determined by the Environmental Protection Agency to be toxic, and in parallel with efforts such as this bill, Massachusetts is working towards a tight detection limit for these chemicals in the water supply. Providing safety for our firefighters and providing upstream elimination of harmful contaminants is good human and environmental policy.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, with 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, strongly urges this committee to give H. 3661 a favorable report. We need to protect firefighters who receive the most intense exposure to flame retardants every time they respond to a fire. Wearing equipment that can poison firefighters while they're fighting fires is unconscionable.

Thank you for your consideration.