

TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 973, An Act to Provide for the Safe Collection and Recycling of Mercury-Containing Light Bulbs

Joint Standing Committee for Natural Resources
Room 214, Cross State Office Building
9:00 a.m., Friday, April 3, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Goodall, Representative Duchesne and Members of the Joint Standing Committee for Natural Resources. I am Kellie Miller, Director of Public Health Policy for the Maine Medical Association, speaking in support of this bill, and in particular for Dr. Lani Graham, a member of the Association's Public Health Committee, a practicing physician and a public health expert. The Maine Medical Association is a professional organization representing over 3,000 physicians, residents and medical students, whose mission is *"to support Maine physicians, advance the quality of medicine in Maine, and promote the health of all Maine citizens."*

Dr. Graham was Maine's Chief Health Officer when the first statewide warning regarding the consumption of fish contaminated by mercury was issued almost 15 years ago. Maine led the nation in issuing that unfortunate warning. Since then about forty states have followed our example. For Dr. Graham and our Association it was an important moment because we came to understand that mercury is dangerous to the health of our children just as lead has been for centuries. But we thought, with mercury, through early warnings and aggressive action, we could avoid the terrible toll that lead has taken on children for so long.

Over the last few years Maine has taken many steps to reduce mercury in the environment, such as eliminating mercury switches in cars and working hard to reduce air borne mercury. Unfortunately, like lead, mercury has many uses and gets into the environment in many ways. In our eagerness to reduce our energy use and hence our dependence on fossil fuels, we began encouraging the use of florescent light bulbs that contain mercury, and once again more mercury escaping into our environment became a threat. Many Maine families don't know that these bulbs contain mercury and may discard them in the trash.

Ironically, these mercury containing light bulbs can help reduce mercury in our environment by reducing energy use and the use of coal fired plants, which release mercury into the air. Therefore we don't want to stop using these energy savers, rather we want to set standards for the amount of mercury allowed in the bulbs and ensure that the mercury in them does not leach into our environment. LD 973 is written to achieve those goals.

Let's not give up on energy reduction or our efforts to prevent human exposure to mercury.

I thank you for your attention and would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.