

Testimony of Senator Susan M. Collins
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Hearing on Air Monitoring Legislation
July 13, 2022

Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito, thank you for holding today's hearing to examine air quality monitoring proposals. I appreciate the opportunity to testify about the Comprehensive National Mercury Monitoring Act, which I have introduced with the distinguished Chairman. Our bipartisan bill would help ensure that we have accurate information about mercury pollution in the United States.

As this committee knows, mercury is a potent neurotoxin. Exposure can lead to significant health problems, especially in children and pregnant women. Mercury exposure has gone down as U.S. mercury emissions have declined; however, levels remain unacceptably high.

In Maine, some of our lands and bodies of water face higher mercury pollution compared to the national average. Maine is located at what has been called the “tailpipe of the nation,” as the winds carry pollution, including mercury, from the west into Maine.

A system for collecting information, such as we have for acid rain and other pollution, does not currently exist for mercury, despite its dangers. A comprehensive national mercury monitoring network is needed to protect human health, safeguard fisheries, and track the effect of emissions reductions. This monitoring network would also help policy makers, scientists, and the public better understand the sources, consequences, and trends in mercury pollution.

Specifically, our legislation would do the following:

First, it would direct the EPA, in conjunction with other appropriate federal agencies, to establish a national mercury monitoring program to measure and monitor mercury levels in the air and watersheds, water and soil chemistry, and in marine, freshwater, and terrestrial organisms at multiple sites across the country.

Second, it would establish a scientific advisory committee to make recommendations for the establishment, site selection, measurement, recording protocols, and operations of the monitoring program.

Third, our bill would establish a centralized database for existing and newly collected environmental mercury data that could be accessed easily on the Internet. These

data would be compatible with similar international efforts.

Fourth, the reporting requirements in our bill will help Congress assess the mercury pollution reduction levels that need to be achieved in order to help prevent adverse human and ecological effects.

Finally, our bill would authorize \$95 million over three years to carry out these important activities.

A robust national mercury monitoring network is required to provide the data needed to help Congress and others make decisions that can protect the people of Maine and the nation. I would ask consent that an endorsement letter from the American Geophysical

Union be entered into the hearing record.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. I hope the Committee will favorably report our bill for consideration by the full Senate.