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TESTIMONY RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 5702, AN ACT CONCERNING SAFE  
WORKPLACES

Labor and Public Employees Committee Hearing

February 20, 2007

Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA), the professional organization for registered nurses in Connecticut. The Connecticut Nurses' Association is providing testimony on H.B.5702, AN ACT CONCERNING SAFE WORKPLACES.

With Florence Nightingale's beginnings, nurses have always been concerned about environmental health. The protection of health, the prevention of illnesses and the advocacy for patients, their families and the communities that they care for make nurses an important advocate for changes that will make a difference for years to come.

The development of a Connecticut plan for encouraging employers to replace toxic chemicals used in the workplace with safer alternatives is a foundational step to making Connecticut a safer place to live and work. Taking action on this plan would make Connecticut proactive in reducing potential threats from toxins.

There are now about 85,000 synthetic substances that have been invented with essentially no controls or restrictions on their production. Unlike drugs and medications there is no organization that provides reviews for safety like the Federal Drug Administration. Many of these substances have been identified as toxic and are being linked to health damage.

All of us are at risk for health problems associated with these toxins, but our children are especially vulnerable. With bodies that are growing and cells dividing – even small amounts when toxins combine can be very harmful. Also, the synergy of multiple substances can be much greater than the individual substances alone.

Nurses support this legislation because it is a positive step toward providing environmentally healthy workplaces and have the potential to reduce toxic chemicals in the environment. Unless we become proactive we will continue to see health care costs skyrocket as these potentially harmful substances remain in our environment. The current legislation replaces toxic chemicals with safer alternatives –healthier manufacturing –safe guards -- and improves health for workers, the community and the state.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. We are available for information and consultation about this important issue.