

Testimony to Support HB6496: An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools
February 23, 2009

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and other members of the Education Committee, my name is Kerry Swift and I am a member of the Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools or ConnFESS. I originally became involved in indoor air quality issues because my children were affected by problems with indoor air pollution in the Brookfield Schools. My oldest daughter actually developed asthma when she began attending kindergarten. Her incessant deep cough developed that September and would disappear during school breaks. We were able to mostly control the cough with several medicines, but her problem persisted for several years until some IAQ best management practices were employed. After a thorough cleaning, our schools began using HEPA vacuums, microfiber cloths, old area rugs in classrooms were removed, and walk-off mats are used at all entrances. Her asthma disappeared and hasn't returned in the years since. She is now a high school junior.

Without a doubt, the use of HEPA vacuums, microfiber cloths and walk-off mats do provide superior cleaning and optimal protection for school occupant health. These modern cleaning methods do pay for themselves within a short period of time. However, if school districts were required to purchase them, there would be some upfront costs. Though it is regrettable, but due to difficult economic times ConnFESS requests that vacuums be deleted from line 8 of HB6496. We do not want this bill to include unfunded mandates. ConnFESS believes the free training that will be required will encourage school districts to eventually purchase such upgraded equipment.

As a volunteer for ConnFESS for the last few years, I've fielded phone calls for all regions of the state. Most of the time we hear from parents, teachers and staff where IAQ best management practices are not being used and the health and safety of school occupants has been compromised. Symptoms usually only occur when students or school personnel are in the building and dramatically improve the longer they are away from the sick building.

I am pleased to see that HB6496 if implemented as written would improve communication between school officials, parents and members of school communities. Sometimes when school officials withhold information about school facility conditions and management practices, relationships become adversarial and trust breaks down. Parents, myself included, have been forced to resort to formal Freedom of Information requests just to gain access to basic information that would be made readily available through the legislative language found on section 1, page 3 (line 61 – 75) and page 7 line 208. This language and policy would improve communication and trust. It would discourage school officials from defensively withholding basic information that parents, teachers, staff and custodians have a right to know. This yearly notification can be done in the student and teacher handbooks just as we presently do our annual pesticide notice and asbestos statement in Brookfield. Updated lists of cleaning products can be listed on the district's website. The School Facilities Survey, ED050 would need to be updated to include a section on green cleaning practices. The ED050 should then be made available within a month of submission to the State Board of Education School Facilities Unit and placed on the district's website. ED050 is difficult for parents to find on the State website. The older and more out of date the information becomes the less useful it is.

I am glad this bill is being supported by the State Office of the Child Advocate, Connecticut Parent Teacher Association, and the Commission on Children.

Marne Usher of Connecticut PTA has stated, "Connecticut PTA supports HB 6496 as a common sense and cost-effective way to safeguard the health of students and their teachers.

Liz Brown of the Connecticut Commission on Children wrote, "Phasing in safer alternatives to hazardous cleaning chemicals will help keep students healthy and ready to learn. There are a growing number of children with asthma and allergies who especially need this protection against toxic cleaning chemicals."



This bill promotes use of safer alternative products. Overall, it is a very good bill that with a few minor changes will make Connecticut a leader in promoting school green cleaning.

As a parent and member of ConnFESS I strongly support HB 6496 An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools. I thank the Education Committee for raising bill and for the opportunity to testify

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CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools

A nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting policies, practices and resources that protect school occupants from environmental health hazards

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Suggestions to Improve Raised HB 6496: An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools

- 1) To eliminate possible fiscal impacts to school districts please
 - Delete vacuum cleaners from line 8
 - Give schools the option of mailing the green cleaning policy or sending it home with students

- 2) To accommodate where individual schools do not have a website, allow postings of ED050 School Facilities Survey, green cleaning policy (line 75) and five year inspection reports (line 208) to be posted on individual school websites and/or Board of Education websites.

- 3) Change the phrase “On or after” to “On or before” in lines 12 and 56, otherwise requirements can occur at any time in the future, even 5 or 10 years from the date specified.

- 4) Update the FIFRA language on lines 8-11 (to match the new language required by PA 08-186 and found in the CT DAS website) by adding after line 11: “or products for which no guidelines or environmental standards have been established.”

- 5) On line 34, please change the word “by” to “and”. On line 35, please change “inspecting” to “inspects”.

- 6) In lines 60-63, staff should also be notified. There should also be a requirement to notify new hires and the parents or guardians of transfer students during the school year (to match the language of the pesticide notification law). Also, on line 62 the word “or” should be changed to “of”.