



TOXICS ACTION CENTER

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Written Testimony of Simone Mellor, Toxics Action Center Campaigns Before the Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee Monday, February 23, 2009

Testimony in Support of House Bill 6496, “An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools”

Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on House Bill 6496 “An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools.”

Toxics Action Center Campaigns is a non-profit, public health and environmental organization. Since 1987, we have worked side by side with over 575 neighborhood groups across New England to help clean up and prevent toxic pollution in their communities, and developed numerous long-term citizen leaders for the environmental and social change movements. We have been working with the Connecticut foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools to protect the health and safety of students, teachers, and other employees on school grounds. We support the position of the Connecticut foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools in support of HB 6496: “An Act Concerning Green Cleaning in Schools.”

The average person spends the vast majority of their time inside a building of some kind. In fact, 20% of the population, nearly 55 million people spends their days in our elementary and secondary schools. With most cases of poor indoor air quality occurring in schools, this poses a hazard. In the 1990s, studies show that 1 in 5 of our nation’s schools reported unsatisfactory indoor air quality. This is a consequence of toxic cleaning chemicals in schools. In fact, twenty-five percent of cleaning chemicals used in schools are toxic and contribute to poor indoor air quality.

Cleaning chemicals can lead to serious health consequences. This is particularly apparent in children because their size, increased metabolic rates and developing organ systems make them more susceptible to toxic cleaning chemicals. Cleaning products that have not been approved by an independent third party can contain phthalates, glycol ethers, ethanalamines, quaternary ammonium compounds, volatile organic compounds, formaldehyde and benzene. If a school does not have appropriate ventilation these chemicals can pose enormous short and long term health risks. Short term symptoms may include rashes, headaches and dizziness. While long term consequences may include reproductive disorders, cancer and major organ damage. In addition, volatile organic compounds that evaporate in the air can irritate student and personnel’s eyes, nose, throat and lungs. This can lead to difficulty breathing and/or coughing, vomiting, cramping or diarrhea.

Despite safer and affordable alternatives, some Connecticut schools remain using toxic cleaning products that can contribute to poor indoor air quality and can consequently cause health problems with students and school personnel. In addition, other Connecticut school districts are not using green cleaning products



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certified by an independent, third party, nor green cleaning practices advocated by experts in the field. An effective green cleaning program is easily implemented by three essential steps: switching to independent, third party certified cleaning products, using 21st century equipment, and implementing simple, state of the art green cleaning procedures. This transition should occur as part of the school's indoor air quality program.

Since 2003, Connecticut schools have been required to adopt an IAQ program by An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools. In order to protect the health and safety of school building occupants, pass HB 6496, "An Act Concerning Indoor Air Quality in Schools." This legislation would require schools to implement a green clean program- an effective way of making schools clean, healthy and safe. In order to be successful, the Green Cleaning program needs to require: that schools use independent, third party certified products that are environmentally preferable; a training for school facilities managers and cleaning personnel in proper product application, mixing, dilution and disposal; a progress report by schools on adoption and implementation of their Green Clean program; in addition, that schools must annually notify parents, guardians and staff with a written Green Cleaning Policy at the same time that they notify in writing about the pesticide usage policy.

All employees and attendees at Connecticut schools have the right to a healthy environment and the right to breathe clean air. There are many reasons to pass House Bill 6496, "An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools." Specifically, I urge the members of the education committee to pass HB 6496 out of committee to protect the health of Connecticut students, teachers, and other school employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

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