

Testimony in Support of: HB 6496, An Act Concerning Green Cleaning in Schools

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, Representative Lesser, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and provide testimony on this important initiative, Bill 6496 An Act Concerning Green Cleaning in Schools. My name is Nancy Simcox. I am a research industrial hygienist at the University of Connecticut Health Center. My area of expertise is occupational and environmental health. I serve on the Connecticut School Indoor Environment Resource Team (CSIERT), and on the Board of the Connecticut Council of Occupational Safety and Health. I strongly support this bill as an approach that encourages and promotes the use of safer alternatives to toxic chemicals. A green cleaning program can reduce chemical exposures and provide important benefits to the health of our children, teachers staff, custodians. The program also protects the environment. My experience in working with school facility directors and custodians show that they are ready to embrace green cleaning in their schools, and are ready to be leaders of the green economy with these new green jobs. Connecticut can serve as a model for other states by passing this important bill.

I have worked with the National Collaborative Work Group on Green Cleaning and Policy Reform in Schools to bring their Cleaning for Health Schools Toolkit to Connecticut. By working through CSIERT and the Tools for Schools Program at the CT Department of Public Health, we have developed a modified Cleaning for Health Program that works for Connecticut school communities. Many schools have successfully implemented a green cleaning for health program in their communities. This bill is necessary to ensure that all Connecticut children, teachers/staff, and custodians in our school communities benefit from a green cleaning for health program.

The Cleaning for Health program was developed to reduce asthma triggers and other health effects from institutional cleaning. Ingredients in common cleaning products have been directly linked to asthma, with custodians experiencing one of the highest rates of occupational asthma. Studies show that 6 out of 100 janitors using traditional cleaning products experience chemical related injuries, including burns to eyes and skin. Other health problems linked to cleaning chemicals include chronic respiratory illnesses.

The CSIERT Cleaning for Health Program is an educational and technical assistance program designed to help schools transition to the new generation of less-toxic cleaning chemicals and to adopt state-of-the-art cleaning practices. It focuses on three key concepts: 1)less-toxic cleaning products that are certified by a third-party as environmentally preferable, 2)high filtration cleaning equipment, and 3) best practices. Technical assistance begins with a Cleaning Products and Practices Evaluation. The Evaluation is conducted by trained industrial hygienists from the University of Connecticut Health Center, Yale University and other organizations. At the end of the evaluation, the school is provided a checklist with resources and cost-effective recommendations to improve the school's cleaning practices and products in cost-effective ways.

I have worked with school facility directors across the state of Connecticut to promote the program. During my evaluations, I have been told by facility directors how the transition to going green has saved the school money, and how helpful custodians have found our training sessions. We have found that the model works effectively through the CT Tools for Schools Program because we can focus on the needs of each school district, and the evaluations include head custodians from each school. By working together on green cleaning with our school districts, local health departments, building and grounds school associations, and unions, we are improving the health of our school communities and protecting our environment. I look forward to the passage of this bill and continuing our work with school communities in Connecticut to implement a Cleaning for Health Program in their school district.

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