

Written Testimony of Pamela Puchalski, Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health (ConnectiCOSH), Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee, March 1, 2010, Testimony in Support of HB 5126 and HB 5130

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy and members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Pamela Puchalski and I am the Coordinator for ConnectiCOSH's Safer Chemicals in the Workplace Campaign that focuses on chemical policy reform here in Connecticut. We appreciate that the Environment Committee is considering policies that would promote safer, greener chemicals in the workplace and the home.

Our organization strongly supports **HB 5126**, An Act Establishing a Chemical Innovations Institute at the University of Connecticut. We believe that the proposed institute would help make Connecticut businesses more competitive on a global and national level while offering more protection for workers, consumers and the environment from hazardous chemicals. Although our written testimony is primarily focused on HB 5126, we also support **HB 5130**, An Act Concerning Child Safe Products, because efforts to prioritize and list the most toxic chemicals raises awareness about the types of substances that we should move away from as a society and can particularly help to reduce worker exposure at facilities where children's products are manufactured.

In the recent past, modern technology has dramatically changed the landscape of our workplace, our homes and our environment. More than 80,000 synthetic chemicals have been produced for use in the United States since World War II. Only a small number of these have been adequately tested for their potential impact on the workers who use them and the consumers who purchase products containing them. Workers who regularly come in contact with dangerous substances and who therefore receive a higher dose than the general public, bear a disproportionate share of the adverse impacts of products made with toxic chemicals. A conservatively estimated 50,000 - 60,000 deaths occur in our country each year due to occupational toxic chemical exposures and other occupational illnesses. (Leigh, et al, 2000; NIOSH; Steenland, et al, 2003).

OSHA has adopted workplace exposure limits for approximately 7% of chemicals used in the U.S. in high volume and the U.S. has only phased out five substances out of the approximately 80,000 in commerce. At our annual convention in the fall, then Acting Deputy Secretary of OSHA Jordan Barab addressed the need for chemical policy reform but also reiterated that Fed OSHA could only do so much because of so many other pressing health and safety issues in the workplace. This brings us to why a Chemical Innovations Institute would be of benefit to Connecticut and its businesses.

Over 200 diseases and disorders are now linked to toxins in our everyday environments. Toxic chemicals and heavy metals are widely used in products and industry, and threaten health and child development. Replacing toxic chemicals with safer alternatives can reduce the number of people who develop cancer, learning disabilities, reproductive and neurodegenerative disorders and other health issues. In Connecticut, one of the largest occupational epidemiology studies in the US is currently assessing the links between chemical exposures in the workplace and a rare form of brain cancer.

A few years ago, a manufacturing company here in Connecticut found out that some of its retirees were going blind within a few years of retiring. Upon further investigation, it was determined that one of the chemicals used in the final degreasing processes was causing the blindness. After much research and hundreds of thousands of dollars later, the company was able to substitute a safer alternative for that particular chemical. In a similar situation, but with the establishment of a Chemical Innovations Institute, the Institute could have provided the research and subsequent data more quickly and at a much lower fee than the company ultimately paid. This company was very financially solvent and was able to support the change while maintaining production, but there are others out there that do not have the resources to pay for outside researchers. The Chemical Innovations Institute would also be set up to collaborate with similar institutions in other states and nations thereby expanding their data base on a regional, national and even global level.

Safer alternatives to toxic chemicals exist in some of our workplaces now, including cleaning agents, degreasers, metal working fluids, metals, and plasticizers. Most recently, 200 US chemical plants have added safer technologies to eliminate poison gas releases to workers and communities. The European Union has restricted toxic chemicals in electronics, cosmetics and other products and adopted comprehensive chemical safety requirements (REACH) and over 30% of Connecticut's trade is with the European Union's member states. Innovation is good for business and can help stimulate economic growth through the design and production of safer products. Companies that innovate can compete internationally, particularly with the European Union which has modernized its toxic policies

ConnectiCOSH promotes safer chemicals, safer products, and safer jobs. We need legislators to do the same. We hope you will take action to make Connecticut a leader in reducing exposure to toxic chemicals for our children, workers, general public and the environment by voting for House Bill 5126 and House Bill 5130.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Pamela Puchalski

# ConnectiCOSH

683 North Mountain Road · Newington, CT 06111 · (860) 953-COSH (2674) · Fax (860) 953-1038  
pamela.ctcosh@snet.net