

Written Testimony of Jennifer Hatch, Program Associate, on behalf of the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group.

Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee
March 1, 2010

**Testimony in Support of HB 5130 “AAC Child Safe Products” and
HB 5126 “AA Establishing a Chemical Innovations Institute at the University of
Connecticut”**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bills 5130 and 5126. The Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG) is a statewide non-profit consumer advocacy organization that works to stand up for consumers against issues such as public health threats. At the national level, we worked to include phase-outs of lead and phthalates in the 2008 Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act. This was a strong step toward safer products for children, and was possible thanks to the leadership of states like Connecticut that had taken action to restrict lead and other chemicals of high concern. However, lead and phthalates are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to hazardous substances in consumer products, and products designed for children.

Every year, ConnPIRG releases a new version of our report *Trouble in Toyland*, outlining current hazards present in children’s products, including the presence of toxins. Through this report we have pushed for consumer protections including banning known toxic chemicals, for enforcement of existing laws and for putting tools in consumers’ hands. We’re working for holistic solutions as well as tackling individual dangerous chemicals, but both are necessary to protect especially our youngest consumers. Research this year showed that the toxic metal cadmium is present in a wide range of children’s products including jewelry and certain plastic items. Cadmium is a known human carcinogen that can also harm the kidneys, lungs, and other organ systems. Connecticut and many other states have passed cadmium restrictions for product packaging, but not for the products inside the packaging. ConnPIRG supports legislation that would phase out this metal from children’s products, but also recognizes that a one-chemical-at-a-time approach will not solve the larger problem.

An Act Concerning Child Safe Products would put Connecticut on the path toward more proactive regulation of chemicals of concern. Maine and Washington have passed similar laws, and Connecticut now has the opportunity to borrow from their research and prioritize the most highly toxic chemicals for phase-out. This approach will help protect

our youngest and most vulnerable consumers from hidden, toxic dangers in the products designed for their use, and also help model the types of reforms that are needed federally to protect all Americans.

An Act Creating a Chemical Innovations Institute at UConn is a proposal that we also strongly support. Our sister organization in Massachusetts was instrumental in establishing a similar Institute – the Toxic Use Reduction Institute – in that state in 1989. Having a central hub for information on safer alternatives to toxic chemicals (particularly cleaning chemicals) has helped Massachusetts businesses reduce the use of toxic cleaning solvents and create safer workplaces. We believe that a similar entity in Connecticut could partner with TURI and similar institutes in other states to provide cutting-edge research to our companies and help make sure that they can comply with increasingly stringent chemical policies in the global marketplace.

Thank you for taking the lead on chemical policy reform – there are clear benefits for public health, the environment, and the strength of our economy.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hatch
ConnPIRG