

Written Testimony of  
James O'Connor, Principal  
Mary R. Tisko Elementary  
Branford, CT

Environment Committee  
March 16, 2012

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, Senator Roraback, Representative Chapin and members of the Environment Committee my name is James O'Connor and I am Principal of Mary R. Tisko Elementary in Branford. I am writing in opposition to HB 5121, An Act Concerning the Use of Organic Pesticides on School Property and Authorizing Municipal Regulation of the Use of Pesticides on Residential Property. However, I do support legislation raised by the Planning & Development Committee House Bill 5155 which would permit schools 8<sup>th</sup> grade and under to utilize pesticides under an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program overseen by the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. Since the ban on pesticides took place on July 1, 2010 I've seen firsthand how our school grounds and athletic fields of deteriorated.

Unfortunately, I am not able to be in attendance because my students are in the midst of taking the Connecticut Mastery tests. In the way of background, I have been a teacher and administrator for the last twenty years working in New Haven, Hamden, and finally Branford. I have had the opportunity of seeing millions of dollars spent on beautiful schools with both local and state dollars for our students during my tenure and it is my dream to see both academic and extracurricular activities happening both in and outside of our schools daily. I believe with many of the topics your discussing in other hearings we are getting closer to improving instruction for our students but we have forgotten a key piece of the in the whole picture our grounds and facilities. I support the use of an effective IPM plan for schools grounds. Our state law defines IPM as "the judicious use of pesticides to maintain a pest population at or below an acceptable level, while decreasing the use of pesticides." I believe IPM's judicious methods will allow for safe and cost effective methods for school grounds. I believe these restrictive beliefs have lead most districts to expanding their use of synthetic surfaces, rather than, expensive maintenance of all facilities.

I am a strong believer in the use of pesticides under an IPM plan to maintain school grounds and my belief is supported by scientific experts within our state, as well, as the U.S. EPA which recommends "that all schools use IPM to reduce pesticides risks and exposure to children. IPM is a safer and frequently less costly option for effective pest management in a school community." The EPA plan calls for IPM in all schools in the United States by 2015. We in Connecticut have put unneeded stress and burdens to all communities by banning pesticides.

I have directly felt a true pain for the facilities we offer our students and communities outside of the brick and mortar. On the exterior of our schools, I have a seen weeds and poison ivy over take my courtyards and fields in all three schools I have worked at since the ban of pesticides. I deal with mice and other pest populations exploding in my school, while I should be spending time on reducing the achievement gap and improving student learning. It is our responsibility to create a safe environment for all. We have seen the use of these fields decrease yearly because of the lack of proper maintenance. I believe this ban and the support for it is short sighted in believing that there are cost effective alternatives on field efficiencies in

our times of cutting teachers. I invite you and any of your colleagues to visit my school and walk a day in children's lives to understand my position.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony to you on this important issue to my school.