



**Written Testimony of Anne Hulick, Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut,
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee,
March 16, 2012**

Testimony in Support of:
**Senate Bill 93 AN ACT CONCERNING A MERCURY THERMOSTAT
COLLECTION AND FINANCIAL INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

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

My name is Anne Hulick, RN, MS, JD and I am the Coordinator of the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut (CSHC). I am also a nurse with many years of experience in environmental health. CSHC is a large coalition comprised of over fifty member organizations of health professionals, environmental justice advocates, labor groups, public health professionals, environmental experts, faith based groups, scientists and many individuals across Connecticut that are concerned about the growing body of research linking exposure to toxic chemicals with the rise in serious diseases.

The Coalition supports SB 93 An Act Concerning A Mercury Thermostat Collection and Financial Incentive Program. First, this program has worked in other states to reduce exposure to mercury from thermostats. Second, the proposed industry bill (SB 350) does not go far enough and will not be effective.

In 2002, Connecticut passed a comprehensive law which phased out the sale of many products that contain mercury. This was, in part, due to the significant amount of scientific research that showed the harmful effects of mercury exposure particularly to the pregnant women and children. Mercury is a highly toxic metal and a neurotoxin. There have been an overwhelming amount of peer-reviewed scientific studies documenting the hazards of mercury exposure. Evidence suggests that exposure to mercury, and other toxic metals, has a profound effect on the developing brain at levels previously thought to be safe. Exposure to mercury particularly during critical windows of development, such as when a first trimester pregnant mother eats fish, may affect the normal development of specific, sequential neurobiological processes.¹ In fact, the latest research suggests that exposure to industrial chemicals like mercury could be creating a “pandemic of subclinical neurotoxicity—harm to the brain and nervous system that is not linked to a specific diagnosis.”²

¹ Safer Chemicals Healthy Families, “The Health Case for Reforming the Toxic Substances Control Act” (Jan. 2010), p. 9.

² Id. at 9.

This is particularly worrisome when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that one in six women of child bearing age have unsafe levels of mercury in their body. This translates to 630,000 babies born with unsafe exposure to mercury. Could exposure to harmful chemicals like mercury be the reason that neuro-developmental disorders are on the rise in the U.S? We may not know for sure but recent evidence of early exposures and the rising incidence of disease is clearly cause for concern. Learning and developmental disabilities are now estimated to affect approximately 1 in six children under the age of 18 in the U.S. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is conservatively estimated to affect 2 million children and autism-spectrum disorder has seen a ten-fold increase in just fifteen years! About 30% of this dramatic rise cannot be explained away by changes in diagnostic criteria.³

Proposed industry efforts to recycle thermostats containing mercury will not be effective. First, SB 350 will require a recycling program and distribution of collection containers to **participating** collection sites. Unfortunately, there are only a small handful of ‘participating’ sites available. Second, the educational and outreach efforts in the period of 2013-2016 only address “participating” collection sites. There is no incentive or provisions to increase the number of collection sites for mercury thermostats and no requirement that the current participating collection sites distribute any educational material to customers. Third, SB 350 deems that anyone that participates as a collection site is automatically in compliance if they collect thermostats and post signs. This seems hardly enough to increase the recycling rate of these thermostats. Lastly, SB 350 shifts the burden of reporting and educating to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Recommendations to improve the recycling rates or effectiveness of the program will not be required until 2017. There is no reason to wait another five years to implement a more effective program. Therefore, we urge your support of SB 93.

Sincerely,

Anne Hulick

Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut
645 Farmington Avenue, 3rd floor
Hartford, CT 06105
860-232-6232

³ Id. at p.8.