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**Testimony of
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Public Health Committee
March 7, 2012**

Re: S.B. 274, AAC Chemicals of High Concern to Children

Senators Gerratana and Welch, Representatives Ritter and Perillo, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) on the above referenced bill.

S.B. 274 would create a mechanism for identifying chemicals of high concern to children under the age of 12 and establish the Green Ribbon Science Panel. While PCSW's mandate does not include advocating on behalf of children, in this case we represent the voices of women as individuals, mothers, mothers-to-be and consumers.

There is a growing consensus that our exposure to toxic chemicals in consumer products is a risk factor for many serious diseases. Children are exposed to these chemicals at an alarming rate and as a result there are long-term implications for their health and development.

One particular class of chemicals, called endocrine disruptors, have been linked to increased rates of breast cancer, early onset of puberty and rising rates of endometriosis - a leading cause of female infertility. In fact, a large body of research indicates a link between increased infertility rates in women and toxic chemical exposure. According to a report by Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families, at least 12% of women reported difficulty in conceiving and maintaining pregnancy in 2002, an increase of 40% from 1982. The rate has almost doubled in younger women, ages 18–25.

Women of color are disproportionately affected by chemical exposure. As one example, 90% of individuals with the auto-immune disease Lupus are women. Lupus causes the immune system to attack the body's own tissues and organs, resulting in inflammation of the skin, joints, blood, and kidneys.ⁱ African-American women are three times more likely than white women to develop this chronic diseaseⁱⁱ. While the precise causes of lupus are unknown, some studies show that exposure to heavy metals or organic solvents may be associated with the disease.ⁱⁱⁱ

Scientists on the cutting edge of research have found that chemicals such as phthalates, bisphenol A (BPA), perfluorinated compounds, and cadmium are linked to these increases in reproductive health problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we all have some levels of these chemicals in our bodies.^{iv}

Mothers-to-be and breastfeeding mothers are particularly vulnerable to toxic chemical exposure^v. Women's bodies are the first environment for the next generation. Unfortunately, many chemicals that are stored in a woman's body can be passed onto her child while in-utero and later during breastfeeding (many toxic chemicals pass through the placenta and have been found in breast milk). A Study by the Environmental Working Group found that at least 287 hazardous industrial chemicals pass through the placenta to the fetus. Even more startling is that many chemicals are so prevalent in breast milk that if it were to be bottled for sale, most breast milk would not pass FDA regulations. While breastfeeding is clearly still the number one option for building a new baby's immune system, the abundance of toxic chemicals in breast milk is cause for serious alarm.

Lastly, women are the primary consumer decision makers in 85% of households in the United States^{vi}. This means that women are most likely to be purchasing products for their families, including baby products, toys, diapers, sunscreen, clothing, bath products and more. As the main decision makers about what to purchase for their families, women deserve the ability to buy products that are safe. Currently, it is nearly impossible to identify the presence of carcinogens, reproductive or developmental toxins on a product's label. So, even if women are armed with knowledge about the potential presence of toxic chemicals, there is virtually no way for them to make informed decisions about the products they buy.

S.B. 274 is an essential step in protecting the health of women and their families. We applaud the committee for your attention to this matter. Connecticut is already a recognized leader on environmental health issues and the passage of this bill is a continued step in the right direction.

ⁱ National Institute of Environmental Health Studies, Lupus < <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/conditions/lupus/index.cfm> >

ⁱⁱ Lupus Foundation. Statistics on Lupus. Available:

<http://www.lupus.org/webmodules/webarticlesnet/templates/new_newsroomreporters.aspx?articleid=247&zoid=60>

ⁱⁱⁱ Edwards, C.J. and Cooper, C. 2006. Early Environmental Exposure and the Development of Lupus. *Lupus*. 15(11): 814-819.

^{iv} Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families, Toxic Chemicals and Reproductive Health – What's the Link? < <http://blog.saferchemicals.org/2010/11/toxic-chemicals-reproductive-health-what-is-the-relationship.html> >

^v Women's Voices for the Earth, The Impact of Toxic Chemicals on Women's Health < <http://www.womensvoices.org/about/why-a-womens-organization/> >

^{vi} Women's Voices for the Earth, The Impact of Toxic Chemicals on Women's Health < <http://www.womensvoices.org/about/why-a-womens-organization/> >