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Testimony of

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Regarding:

AN ACT CONCERNING TOXIC FIRE RETARDANTS IN CHILDREN'S PRODUCTS

Dear Senator Dante Bartolomeo, Representative Diana Urban, and Members of the Children's Committee:

First thank you for considering my testimony. I would attend your hearing tomorrow, but instead will be holding a class with several hundred students at the same hour. I am a professor of environmental health at Yale and have conducted considerable research on the history of flame-retardants, their presence in the environment and human tissues, and their toxic potential. This research is summarized in a monograph published by Environment and Human Health, Inc. in the fall of 2013, and I understand that you have copies of this report.

I write to support the removal of the flame retardant "Tris" from all products sold in Connecticut intended for use by infants and children. I also believe that the bill is too limited since there are dozens of flame-retardants currently allowed to be added to consumer products sold in the U.S. that need not be labeled under federal law, products that may comprise the environments of children and infants.

Many flame-retardants are highly persistent, and they move freely from our buildings, furnishings, and appliances into dusts that we breathe.

Recent toxicological studies demonstrate that retardants pose the greatest risk to the normal growth and development of fetuses, infants, and small children.

The highest concentrations of flame-retardants have been detected in the youngest in our society, with levels many times higher than the average concentrations found in adults.

Many flame-retardants cross the pregnant woman's placenta and circulate in fetal tissues. Some may change the biochemistry, electronic signaling, and normal function of the nervous and endocrine systems that are essential for cognition, memory, learning, and reproductive success.

Parents were alarmed in the mid-1970s to learn that children's sleepwear contained a chemical called "Tris" (Tris(2,3-dibromopropyl) Phosphate) that was capable of inducing genetic mutations and cancer. This chemical was also capable of being absorbed by their children's bodies.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recognized that Tris posed a significant risk to infants and children, and banned it from children's sleepwear in 1977. The CPSC, however, did not ban the chemical from use in other baby products. Tris can still be found in infants' crib mattresses, changing tables, and car seats. Tris is also used as a fire-retardant in couches, chairs, carpet padding, and other home furnishings. In 2012, Tris was detected in the house dust of 75 percent of those homes tested.

Banning Tris from children's products and from products likely to be used in children's environments is an important and responsible health-protective step in the right direction. However, unless our government establishes a health protective standard for all flame-retardants, manufacturers will simply substitute another chemical with similar properties. This history of substitution has traded one risk for another.

It is time for a more rational policy to regulate flame-retardants. Labeling their presence in consumer products would at least provide the public with warning of possible chemical exposures and risks to children's health.

Beyond labeling, the government should demand complete health hazard testing for flame-retardants before they may be added to products intended for children, or products that are commonly used in children's environments.

Thank you very much for allowing my testimony, and I encourage your efforts toward reforms that better protect human health and environmental quality.

Best regards,

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