

Testimony in Support of

HB 5354, An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern to Children, HB 5035, An Act Concerning Flame Retardants in Children's Products and SB 46, An Act Concerning Pesticides on School Grounds.

Good afternoon. My name is Teresa Eickel and I am the Executive Director of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, a statewide, interfaith environmental organization that works with religious communities to be good stewards of the earth. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the hundreds of congregations that we represent, we wish to urge you to support both HB 5354, An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern to Children, HB 5035, An Act Concerning Flame Retardants in Children's Products, and SB 46, An Act Concerning Pesticides on School Grounds.

In the past 40 years, we have introduced over 80,000 chemicals to our commerce – these chemicals are in our clothes, cleaning products, toys, furniture – the list goes on and on. Not surprisingly, we have also seen an increase in cancer, neurological diseases, and developmental disorders. Every faith tradition speaks of the importance of caring for the most vulnerable among us and I can scarcely think of those more vulnerable than our children. It is in this spirit that the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network asks you to support these bills – these bills protect children in their formative years while their bodies are growing and they are at risk of developing a disease related to toxin exposure, especially cancer.

To support this bill will take some courage. Industry lobbyists and chemical companies are already turning up the heat, pressuring people to reject both pieces of legislation. But we need you to have courage and support these bills. Cases of cancer have sharply increased in the past 40 years. Industry lobbyists will tell you that this is due to improved screening or longer lives. I would like to present 4 cases of people who had cancer who were both young and who did not benefit from early screening. These are 4 people who have courage.

The first is me. On November 18, 2010, I was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer. With no family history and as a self-described health nut, this was a true shock. Everyone was surprised. When I met my oncologist, she took my medical and lifestyle history and said, "Huh. I wonder why you're here." And I thought, "You and me both, lady." I did chemo, then surgery, then radiation, and then another year of infusions of a drug called Herceptin. All-in-all, I was in active treatment for 18 months, which is a long time. My mother said that that first day of chemo was terrifying for her. As bad as it was for me, I can't imagine what it was like for her – you don't stop being a mom just because your child is grown. However, I had a great response to treatment and almost three and a half years later, I am grateful to continue to be cancer-free.

When a child has cancer, the parents must also be brave – braver than they ever thought they could be. My friend, Mary Keany, has a 3 and a half year old daughter, Reagan, who was just 15 months old when she was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia. AML is extremely aggressive and very difficult to treat. The life expectancy for children with AML is very low. Reagan was very lucky - after seven months of grueling chemotherapy, Reagan was declared to be in remission and she has remained there. As you might imagine, Mary is beyond grateful. But this is something no parent should have to go through.

Mary will be a support system for her friends, the Changs, whose 15 month old son, Wes, was just diagnosed with a Stage IV high-risk neuroblastoma, a cancer that is very difficult to treat even with chemo, surgery, radiation, bone

marrow transplants, and other therapies. While his family is reeling from this devastating diagnosis, they still must be brave enough to bring little Wes into the hospital for these painful and debilitating treatments. I don't know what the future holds for Wes, but I know that his parents will fight for him like tigers. No matter how difficult the treatment, they will charge forward with courage. When you are dealing with cancer, all the options are scary and you have no choice but to be brave.

My fourth example of someone with courage is my friend, Amy. I met Amy in 2012 while I was going through treatment. We were seated next to each other in the infusion center and we immediately became friends. Amy was 31 when she was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer. She was a single mom of an adorable little boy named Ethan and she wanted more than anything to be there for him. She also did chemo, surgery, and radiation. Unlike me, though, Amy did not have a good response to treatment. Her cancer was incredibly aggressive and it spread to her liver, lungs, skin, lymph system, and finally, her brain. Through it all, she was brave – she was willing to try anything to give her more time. But it was not to be. She went into the hospital right before Thanksgiving 2013 and spent two weeks there, getting out only for Thanksgiving dinner. I was hoping that she would rally at home once she was released so that she could have one more Christmas. But I think Amy was tired. The pain and suffering were too much. She was released on Friday, December 6 and she died the next morning, December 7, in her mother's home. She was 33. She was a single mom and she left her 5 year-old son just a few weeks before Christmas. It has been almost three months and I miss her a lot.

The reason I keep mentioning bravery is that, when you have cancer, everyone talks about how brave you are. Pictures of smiling, bald people are everywhere and companies can hardly wait to slap a ribbon on their product and tell you how much they support these brave cancer patients. But we don't need another ribbon or another slap on the back. What we need is courage from everyone else. We need it from the company executives because then they will change how they do things. We need it from cancer organizations because then they will stand up and demand what's right. And we need it from legislators because they can pass the laws that protect us. You have so much power to make a difference and we need you to be brave enough to do it.

Please support HB 5354, HB 5035, and SB 46 and protect our children from toxic chemicals. Cancer patients shouldn't be the only ones who are brave. Thank you.

Submitted by:
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