CLEAN WATER ACTION
CONNECTICUT

Testimony of Susan Eastwood, Director of Communications and Outreach
On behalf of Clean Water Action and the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Children's Committee
March 6, 2014

Testimony in support of HB 5354
An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern to Children

Also in support of HB 5035, HB 5305 and SB 46

Good afternoon Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. **I speak in strong support of HB 5354, An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern to Children.**

My name is Susan Eastwood, and I am the Director of Communications and Outreach at Clean Water Action and the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut. Clean Water Action is a non-profit organization with one million members nationwide and over 20,000 members in Connecticut. I help staff the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut, a group of over 60 non-profits working to phase out toxic chemicals from everyday products. I live in Ashford and am also a parent of two children who suffer from asthma and allergies.

Clean Water Action greatly appreciates the past work of the CT legislature to protect our children and our environment from the impact of toxic chemicals in consumer goods and hopes they will continue their leadership by passing **HB 5354** this session.

As an advocate, a concerned citizen and a parent, I am concerned about the overwhelming body of scientific research that links exposure to toxic chemicals in our everyday products with the rising incidence of many serious diseases. Over 30 years of environmental health studies have linked toxins to diseases such as cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's as well as asthma, infertility and learning disabilities. Young children and developing fetuses are especially vulnerable; exposure to even a small amount can affect a child for life. In 2010, the President's Cancer Panel Report stated that exposure to toxic chemicals is a serious risk factor for many cancers and called for urgent reform of ineffective chemical laws.[1]

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[1] Reducing Environmental Cancer Risk: What We Can Do Now, the President's Cancer Panel [Internet]. Bethesda: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; [cited 2010 April] Available from: http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/advisory/pcp/annualReports/pcp08-09rpt/PCP_Report_08-09_508.pdf.

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There is growing consensus that the federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) does not adequately protect citizens from harmful chemicals in everyday products. Our nation's workers, consumers, and children need to be protected by stronger, more comprehensive chemical policy reforms that define intelligent and responsible development and use of the thousands of chemicals manufactured in the world today. But federal reform efforts are unlikely to pass in the near future. States like ours can lead by passing laws to protect our children and lead the country forward by example. **HB 5354** continues Connecticut's leadership in protecting its most vulnerable citizens and giving parents the essential information they need to make rational decisions for their families.

HB 5354 simply requires that the toxicologists at DPH will provide a report to the legislature every two years which presents their review of chemicals of high concern to the health of young children and recommends appropriate actions to the legislature. They will call on the growing body of research and information available about chemicals used in children's products and their potential health impacts. This is a simple report which can be used by the legislature in making future decisions.

The bill will not place an undue burden on our state agencies or on manufacturers. It has no fiscal impact! Because the European Union, Maine, Washington, California and Minnesota have already identified chemicals of concern, the Department of Public Health can utilize these lists rather than recreating the wheel. And manufacturers are already reporting the presence of toxic chemicals in the European Union, Maine and Washington and soon will be in other states. A recent report from Washington State is an example of the new data available to help identify products that contain chemicals of concern.[2]

The European Union is in the process of phasing out hundreds of chemicals of high concern as part of their REACH legislation. Many countries are following the lead of the EU, including China, and U.S. manufacturers will have to find and use safer alternatives in order to stay competitive in the world market. Even leading American companies recognize that shifting to safer alternatives is not only good for public health but makes good economic sense.[3]

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[2] Uding, Nancy and Erika Schreder, "What's in Your Cart? Toxic Chemicals in Your Shopping Cart" 2014. Washington Toxics Coalition; Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families; Safer States. Available online: http://watoxics.org/publications/whatsonyourlist_report_final.pdf/at_download/file

[3] Safer Chemicals Healthy Families, "Chemicals and Our Health: Why Recent Science is a Call to Action" (2012)

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Above all, parents don't want harmful chemicals in children's products!!! As the parent of two grown children, I shudder to think of what I may have unknowingly exposed them to and what the health impacts may have been. My daughter has asthma, which she battled as a child, and my son has life-threatening allergies. But research shows that health problems like cancer or infertility may take decades to manifest. We didn't know what was in the products we lovingly bought for our children. Now I know that most children's clothing contains formaldehyde, and that soft plastics often contain endocrine-disrupting phthalates, and I seek safer alternatives. But the irony is that we still know very little about what's in the products we buy! Recently, I shopped for a gift for my new grandnephew. I found a teether that was BPA free, but there was no information about what made the plastic pliable. I purchased a green cotton onesie but there was no label to tell me if it was treated with carcinogenic tris flame retardants. Parents and indeed, the rest of us, shouldn't have to have a PhD in chemistry to go shopping for a baby present! Taking meaningful steps to make that information more available will help all of us to make better choices. Addressing exposure to toxic chemicals at key stages of development will ultimately help to reverse the rising incidence of chronic disease among our children, and reduce health care costs in Connecticut as well.[4]

Connecticut has been a national leader by phasing out lead, cadmium, mercury and BPA however, this is not enough! Parents should not have to wonder whether common household products are harming their children! **We have a right to know what chemicals are in products we buy!**

I urge you to make passing **HB 5354** a priority this legislative session. We are also **in support of HB 5035, HB 5305 and SB 46.**

Thank you!

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[4] Safer Chemicals Healthy Families, "The Health Case for Reforming the Toxic Substances Control Act" (2009).