

Testimony of Pamela Puchalski
of the Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Children

March 6, 2014

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

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and honorable members of the Committee on Children: my name is Pamela Puchalski. I am the Project Coordinator of the Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health and I am testifying in support of HB 5354, An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern to Children.

In order to make the argument in support of SB 126 I ask you to remember the adage that "history repeats itself." Journey back 100 years in America's history. While industries touted both the amazing properties and safety of using radium, mercury, and asbestos in various machining processes, workers were being made ill by daily exposure to such substances. As weakened bones, cancers, and neurological diseases showed up with increasing regularity, industry disputed the scientific evidence that defined a cause and effect relationship between exposure to the materials and the ill workers' horrific symptoms. After numerous years of continued industrial use of radium, mercury, and asbestos, industry finally conceded that they were the cause of harmful effects to human health.

Fast forward to today. While the chemical industry maintains the efficacy and safety of materials such as the flame retardant Tris, the metal Cadmium, and the synthetic chemical BPA in the manufacturing of various children's products, science has demonstrated the link between the increasing incidence of various reproductive disorders such as infertility, behavioral disorders such as ADHD, and childhood cancers such as Leukemia to such substances.

A century ago numerous workers continued to be made ill for years even after scientists, medical practitioners and other workers were documenting causal relationships between such substances as radium, mercury, or asbestos and their illnesses. How many years will it take before industry will concede that flame retardants, chemicals used in the making of plastics, jewelry, and toys cause illness to our children, the most vulnerable of our population? How many children will be sickened by their exposure to these and other unregulated chemicals before we act with precaution and ensure that safety precludes industries' tendencies to avoid being responsible in the face of financial gain? As one looks at data which demonstrates increasing rates of childhood cancers and cancers in general, as well as increasing rates of asthma, autism, reproductive disorders and sees the higher body burden from exposure as experienced by children it is obvious to see that our focus must be on the children of today. They will ultimately be the workers and consumers of tomorrow.

I support HB 5354 because in 100 years not enough has changed. We can't expect industry to necessarily do the right thing for consumers or their workers and we can't take for granted that our federal government will protect us or our children from potential hazards that manufacturers are still refusing to acknowledge. Essentially, for all the opposition that SB 126 will face from industries of today, it is such a small step in the right direction, but at least it is in the right direction. It is a step toward educating and empowering the consumer and it is a step toward establishing a more sustainable, comprehensive, and proactive policy around chemical policy reform than we have had in the past. I challenge the 2014 Connecticut Legislature to take this step and vote for HB 5354 An Act Concerning Chemicals of High Concern to Children.

Sincere thanks for your time and consideration,

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