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Testimony in support of SB 46

March 5, 2014

Honorable Members of the Committee On Children,

Re: SB 46 An Act Concerning Pesticides On School Grounds

I am writing testimony in support of SB 46 to extend the ban on toxic lawn pesticides to high school.

When tragedy strikes we pay attention. We are glued to our electronic devices in disbelief. Then there are the less public tragedies like a mother taking her young child with leukemia to the hospital for chemotherapy, the high school athlete about to start college just diagnosed with lymphoma, a baby born with birth defects, or the parents helping their child adjust to life with severe asthma. I have worked in the health care field and I know of the suffering that illness and disease can cause.

While we all try to keep our children safe they are being involuntarily exposed to toxic chemicals like pesticides that can harm them. PESTICIDES KILL LIVING THINGS LIKE PLANTS AND INSECTS AND OUR CHILDREN ARE ALSO LIVING THINGS. If children fell ill or fell dead onto the grass of a pesticide maintained athletic field after a game of soccer, people would be paying a lot of attention AND there would be a lot of press coverage. But illness from these toxins is a less public and less publicized tragedy.

This much is clear – CHILDREN AND LAWN CHEMICALS DON'T MIX (Please see attached article from the national organization Beyond Pesticides). And as with many things there is the good, the bad and the ugly.

First the good news. Connecticut legislators by an overwhelming majority passed landmark legislation to protect children by a ban on lawn pesticides in public and private schools from day care to through grade 8. Now hundreds of thousands of children are protected from involuntary exposure on school grounds.

Now the bad news. Most parents do not even know that this law exists because they are not paying attention to the causes of the everyday tragedies that are affecting others people's children. The bad news is that the pro-pesticide interests have blocked the ban being extended to other places where children play. We need the ban extended to high schools. It makes no sense to protect children's health up to 8th grade and expose them in high school. When illness and disease strike it doesn't care what grade you are in, or your age, or your economic status.

The ugly news is that the billion dollar pesticide industry wants to protect their market share on the backs of our children and our environment. Pro-pesticide interests claim that non-toxic turf care does not work and are trying to reverse the ban and permit the use of all their toxic pesticides. They do this under the guise of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that sounds nice but really means business as usual. IPM is a subterfuge to allow the full use of toxic lawn pesticides. IPM is flawed and puts our children at risk. The ban is stricter and protects children from toxic pesticide exposure. A ban also would protect the applicators who themselves are at risk for exposure and harm. These interests are also trying to block any further expansion of the bill with a variety of tactics. The influence of the pesticide industry and their lobbyists has affected the attitudes of a long line of people - from professional organizations, to facility managers, to athletic directors, to state organizations like CCM, to municipal officials and to the applicators themselves.

No toxic pesticide should be used where children play. There are gaps in testing, pesticides are not really tested for long term toxicity considering the time from exposure to diagnosis of disease can be up to 20 years. Pesticides are not tested in combination and in the formulations that they are actually used. These formulations can be more toxic than the active ingredient alone. On top of this, the testing is done by the chemical companies who manufacture the pesticides – the fox is guarding the chicken coop.

Non-toxic care of fields works well when done properly. Success is due to know how. Lots of workshops and classes have been offered, but more importantly success is an attitude to want to protect the health of the kids in the community they serve. In a town that has gone beyond the current law and has all their fields and parks under non-toxic care, the Director of Parks has said, “when I hear that another child in my town gets cancer I want to know it is not because of something I sprayed on my fields.” If elected municipal officials really care about the health of children in their town and want playable fields, they should find someone who actually does non-toxic care successfully and not use those who complain it can’t be done.

BUT THIS IS NOT ABOUT GRASS. PESTICIDE USE IS A MUCH BIGGER STORY. IT IS ABOUT CHILDREN WITH CANCER, CHILDREN WITH LYMPHOMA, CHILDREN WITH LEUKEMIA, CHILDREN WITH ASTHMA, CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS, CHILDREN WITH CHEMICAL SENSITIVITIES AND ALLERGIES. IT IS ABOUT OUR PETS DYING FROM EXPOSURE TO GRASS TREATED WITH PESTICIDES. IT IS ABOUT OUR ENVIRONMENT, THE AIR WE BREATHE, THE WATER WE DRINK, AND THE FOOD WE EAT. IT IS ABOUT ALL OF US AND OUR LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

What kind of society do we live in where money for corporations that manufacture toxic chemicals is valued over the health of our children. Don't we have an obligation, a moral obligation, to our children and future generations to make sure we did all we could to ensure a toxic free legacy.

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