

To: Whom it May Concern in Connecticut Legislature
Testimony Re: HB 5347

My name is Catherine Ward, and I'm writing to present my testimony in support of measure 5347. I am 40 years old and am disabled by a debilitating latex allergy. Before I became disabled, I had a wonderful career as a court-certified Spanish interpreter. Prior to that, I worked in the healthcare field as a Spanish interpreter where I was exposed to latex gloves.

After sleeping on a new natural latex rubber foam bed I bought in November of 2012 for 10 months, I became extremely ill due to an airborne and contact latex allergy, which I was diagnosed with in October of 2013. Earlier that year, I had started to have problems that were milder at first: hay fever-like symptoms, itchy eyes, watery nose, and chest congestion that later progressed to wheezing. The itching became much more severe in September of 2013 and felt like stinging on my head, stomach, legs and different parts of my body. These kept getting worse until even going into the bedroom without getting on the bed started to cause symptoms. I was reacting to the elastic in my clothing as well. I began to have worse wheezing/asthma, hives, and terrible confusion, dizziness and fatigue and would forget what I was doing. I didn't realize that what I was experiencing was anaphylaxis caused by the latex proteins in the bed. I had the bed removed to the garage; yet, I was still having severe latex allergy reactions due to latex residue that was left behind in the house from the bed and was coming in to the house from the garage. I began to constantly have severe allergic reactions to latex in everyday items such as rubber bands, balloons, printer's ink, and floor mats at home, at the grocery store, at medical offices and in any environment I found myself in. At work, I was having latex allergy reactions to my office chair, a plunger in the restroom, newly installed carpet, rubber cell phone cases used by others, and exercise bands that were made of latex. No matter where I went I was always reacting to something made of latex. I sought medical treatment for my latex allergy with a physician whose office I believed to be latex-free because only nitrile gloves were used there. I would get symptoms of a severe latex allergy reaction every time I went there for treatment. I experienced itching and swelling of my mouth, throat, itching of my eyes, face and body, wheezing, and confusion. On two or three of these occasions, after I left the doctor's office, I experienced fever and chills, a migraine, and nausea and diarrhea along with the other symptoms. It would take me two or three days to recover from this. One day I turned around where I was sitting in the exam room when the reaction started and saw that there was a stethoscope and a couple of other instruments made of rubber (latex) on a small table sitting right behind me, so we were able to identify that the doctor's instruments were causing my reactions.

I had been seeing another provider who had dropper bottles of medication on shelves in the lobby of his office. Every time I would go to his office I would react to the airborne latex from the rubber in the dropper bottles as well as to the elastic used in the sheets on the tables where he did my treatments. Once I figured this out, I began to bring my own sheets but would still react to the residue of the latex elastic in the air from previous patients being treated. I would also react to just being in the room where he had a stethoscope, even though he was not using it on me. At my chiropractor's office, I was getting the same latex allergy reactions from the exercise balls he had in the room where he treats patients. He replaced them with latex free ones; however, I still get latex reactions there because not everything in his office can be replaced.

I get severe latex allergy reactions from printer's ink (contains latex) in the air when I go into my doctor's office, even though no latex gloves are used there. I have to be seen outside in the back of the office whenever possible, and when I do have to go into the office, I wear a gas-mask type respirator, change

my clothes when I leave, and then go home and take a shower immediately to remove the latex residue. I've also reacted to latex in some of their instruments such as a blood pressure monitor which was used on me and stethoscopes that were feet away from me and not being used on me.

I was referred to a neurologist for another condition but was unable to find one in my area that does not use latex gloves even though I spent days calling numerous neurologists, so I haven't been able to see one since it would be too dangerous for me to be exposed to the latex residue in the air from the gloves. On January 21, 2015, I had an anaphylactic reaction which required the use of an EpiPen in order to stop my throat/airway from closing up, which was caused in part by eating off a paper plate that unbeknownst to me was contaminated with latex residue from latex glove use and in part from a sock which contained latex elastic inadvertently being left on top of the dryer while in use which caused latex particles to become airborne.

I hope you will seriously consider banning the use of latex in food service and healthcare settings in order to protect others from becoming sensitized to it so that hopefully they will never have to face trying to live their lives with such an extreme latex allergy. You would be making Hawaii a much safer place for people to live and vacation, and your decision would save people from needless suffering and they could lead more productive lives. This would also save employers the expense of having to pay out Worker's Compensation claims when some employees inevitably become sensitized to latex from using latex gloves at work and become disabled due to their latex allergy. HB 5347 is a win-win proposition – your state will save money and bolster its economy by making itself a safer place for tourists to vacation and for residents to work, get safer medical care, and enjoy meals out at restaurants without the concern of life-threatening and possibly fatal anaphylactic reactions due to latex residue on food from the use of latex gloves.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,
Catherine Ward
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