

January 24, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the General Law Committee,

My name is Sandra Hoebeke, and I am writing to you on behalf of HB5347: An Act Prohibiting the Use of Latex Gloves at Food Businesses. This is something that affects me personally, as I have acquired an airborne & contact Latex Allergy while working as a Dental Hygienist. Over the years, I have had a number of reactions after eating at establishments where latex gloves are used in food handling. Some of them required multiple epi pen injections, and a trip to the emergency room.

When I was first diagnosed back in 1999, I did not know if restaurant use would be problematic or not. So when my husband and I went out to dinner a few weeks after diagnosis, I asked the manager at the seafood restaurant we went to about it. We went to a place called "Eat at Joe's", and I informed the manager of my allergy. I figured he would be trained, and know what to do to make things safe for me. He advised me that they used latex gloves and that the allergen would be removed during cooking. I was newly diagnosed and unaware, so I believed him. Huge mistake! Within 20 mins of eating, I became quite ill. I experienced severe abdominal pain; itchy/burning lips, mouth, and eyes; flushing and hives on face, neck, chest; chest tightness/coughing; nausea/vomiting/diarrhea. I needed a number of antihistamines and other meds to stop the reaction. It took 2 days to recover.

Most recently, on 12/1/14, my husband and I stopped into IKEA to try their famous Swedish Meatballs and pick up a piece of furniture. We went in and found out that we would not be eating, because they use latex gloves to handle the food. My husband let them know that they are not supposed to use them, as people are allergic, and that they could potentially kill someone by doing so. I left the area immediately; we picked up what we came for, and left the building. Even in doing so, I experienced symptoms due to my airborne sensitivity & the use of gloves in the building. I was covered in hives and red anywhere my skin was exposed, had itchy watery eyes, burning lips, and had difficulty breathing. I washed my hands, arms, neck, and face as soon as I could & took all of my medications needed a breathing treatment. I was sick the rest of the day from the exposure. That was my first and last time going there. This allergy is difficult enough to manage, as this substance is used in so many things. We should not have to worry about our food being handled with the very thing that can kill us. It would also be incredibly helpful if a warning label could be placed on food that has been handled, or on a menu, so we know sooner rather than later.

Please do the right thing, and pass HB5347. My life, and the lives of many others, depend upon it. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Sandra Hoebeke, RDH
5020 Samantha Lynn Lane, West Branch, MI 48661