

My name is Teresa Eickel and I want to thank the Committee on Children for the opportunity to submit this testimony. As the Executive Director of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, I represent hundreds of religious communities in Connecticut that see our treatment of the planet and its inhabitants as a deeply moral, spiritual, and ethical issue. We wish to express our deep concern at the appalling amount of toxic chemicals that children are exposed to. Every faith tradition speaks of caring for the most vulnerable – I can't think of many more vulnerable than our children, who are exposed to toxic levels of chemicals every day, in their clothes, their toys, their bath products, etc. Not surprisingly, childhood cancers and developmental disorders are on the rise and children's health experts see a direct link to chemical exposure and health problems for children. Sadly, companies are not required to list many of these toxic chemicals on their ingredient lists, so concerned parents are unable to make an informed decision. We must change this – if we refuse to protect our children from danger, then we are failing as a society.

As a cancer survivor, I am grateful to be alive. However, I have lost friends each year – all young women - mothers, wives, sisters, and friends. In the 1960's, a young person with cancer was an anomaly. Every resident wanted the chance to examine the young person with cancer. Nowadays, it's commonplace – nurses and doctors barely bat an eyelash. Some people will tell you that the rise in cancer is because there is better screening or people are living longer. But I can tell you, when a young person walks in with a raging case of cancer, they have not lived too long. And we are not benefiting from more screening, either - when I was diagnosed, I had never had a mammogram because I was too young. And my tumor didn't show up on a mammogram anyway, because mammograms don't work on young women. It showed up on the ultrasound, though, an ugly, jagged thing and all I could think was, "Wow. That thing looks like a monster." I was right.

I believe that the catastrophic rise in cancer is caused in a large part by environmental toxins. These days, kids are constantly exposed to a barrage of chemicals every day. Our children deserve our very best and that requires us to put their health and futures above the profits of any corporation. I urge you to support HB 5653, a bill that will identify harmful chemicals to children and create recommendations to eliminate or replace these chemicals. We owe our children at least this much. Thank you in advance for your courage, leadership, and support.