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A Letter to Connecticut Legislators Concerning Children's Health and Pesticides at Schools

I am a pediatrician and professor of preventive medicine. I am writing to express my strong support for Connecticut's existing legislation that prohibits the use of pesticides on school grounds for grades K-8. This important legislation is not only school legislation, and it is not only pesticide legislation. It is additionally, and perhaps most importantly, public health legislation. This landmark law has helped to reduce the burden of environmental toxins faced by children in Connecticut. It has protected schoolchildren against acute and chronic exposures to pesticides. It has also protected the vulnerable unborn children of teachers, aides, visitors and pregnant staff.

A strong and rapidly expanding body of scientific knowledge links pesticide exposures to a wide range of disease and dysfunction. Children and pregnant women are the two groups in the population at greatest risk of health injury following exposures to pesticides. The organophosphate and pyrethroid pesticides are specifically designed to be toxic to the brain and nervous system. Indeed the war gas, sarin, is a member of the organophosphate family. Exposure of pregnant women to organophosphate pesticides has been linked to learning problems, loss of IQ and behavioral problems in their children. Reports from the National Cancer Institute suggest a link between exposures to pesticides in early life and increased risk of childhood cancer.

I am particularly concerned by the suggestion that the existing very highly protective pesticide law be replaced with newer, weaker legislation that is less highly protective of children's health. Under the rubric of "Integrated Pest Management" or "IPM," this new legislation would end the current ban on the use of pesticides on school grounds and replace it with an approach that permits the use of all pesticides. A further weakness of this proposed new legislation is that it would allow persons with little or no training in toxicology or pediatrics to make decisions with potentially profound implications for the health of Connecticut's children. This approach is not wise.

In closing, let me congratulate you for having enacted strong and scientifically valid legislation to protect the health of children in Connecticut against chemical pesticides. I urge you to resist calls for repeal or revision of the current law.

Sincerely,

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