

**Written Testimony of Pamela Puchalski, Project Coordinator
of the Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Children
in support of HB 5299 An act concerning toxic flame retardant chemicals in
children's products and upholstered residential furniture**

March 3, 2016

Good Afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Pamela Puchalski and I am the Project Coordinator for the Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health, a labor affiliated organization which focuses on health and safety in the workplace. I come before you today to ask that you support HB 5299 An act concerning toxic flame retardant chemicals in children's products and upholstered residential furniture.

Flame retardant chemicals were created to retard flames in various manmade synthetic materials such as polyurethane foam because these manmade materials ignite and burn much more rapidly than natural materials. Studies have demonstrated that ignition of products made of these synthetic materials containing the flame retardants is only delayed by a few seconds and once ignited they burn faster, create darker smoke and more noxious fumes than natural materials. In a dramatic demonstration comparing the ignition of a room composed of furniture and household items from the 70's and a room composed of items found in today's households, the Today show recently demonstrated how 30 years ago a person had about 17 minutes to escape a house fire while today that escape time is down to 3-4 minutes.

Obviously, there is a problem here and the use of flame retardants is not the answer because their use has created a whole new set of issues, the main one affecting children's health. Flame retardant chemicals have been linked to a variety of nervous system impairments such as seizures, memory loss, and learning problems. Early research shows that they may disrupt hormone levels and are neurotoxic. Although no human studies have been conducted as of yet, evidence against TDCPP, one of the flame retardant chemicals cited in HB 5299, is suggesting that it may impact fertility by influencing hormone levels and semen quality in men. What we allow children to be exposed to now in their highly vulnerable state may well be setting them up for health problems in their adult life. It is likely that exposure to these flame retardants could ultimately preclude them to learning disabilities, being unable to conceive a child, developing cancer, or some type of Senile Dementia.

These flame retardants are also affecting the health of the firefighters who fight today's fires. Exposure to these burning chemicals has resulted in dramatic increases in cancer rates in firefighters as was found in a study of 30,000 firefighters from three large cities. Their health issues have been linked to their exposures to the noxious fumes created by the burning chemicals found in furniture, electronics, flooring, insulation, and other building materials that, once ignited, become toxic fumes that are potentially carcinogenic and poisonous.. This study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) further corroborated the results of several smaller studies that found that firefighters were more likely to develop cancers of the respiratory, digestive, and urinary systems and were two times as likely to develop mesothelioma. (Original article: Mortality and cancer incidence in a pooled cohort of US firefighters from San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia (1950–2009)Occup Environ Med oemed-2013-101662Published Online First: 14 October 2013)

HB 5299 addresses six of the most commonly used flame retardants. It is a step in the right direction for improving the health of our children, our citizens in general and the brave firefighters who put their lives on the line to save us and our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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