Testimony by
Tom Swan, Executive Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG)
in support of HB 6516
An Act Concerning Toxic Chemical Flame Retardants in Children’s Products and Residential Upholstered Furniture

Public Health Committee
February 25th, 2019

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg and other members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Tom Swan and on behalf of thousands of CCAG I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 6516, An Act Concerning Toxic Chemical Flame Retardants in Children’s Products and Residential Upholstered Furniture.

Chemical flame retardants they are highly toxic and are ineffective at retarding flames. These chemicals have been added to products containing polyurethane foam and marketed as necessary to save lives. It is now widely accepted that rather than retarding flames, they are highly persistent, bioaccumulative toxic chemicals that off-gas and are commonly found in indoor air and in dust. Research studies show exposure to these chemicals from indoor air and dust is significant and harmful to human health.

Developing babies and young children are particularly vulnerable. Infants and young children have the highest exposures of flame retardants in their blood, often three times higher than adults, as they are often in close proximity or in direct contact with the products containing the foam. These chemicals are neurotoxic, carcinogenic and hormone disruptors. They are linked to lower IQ in children, developmental delays, hyperactivity, decreased fertility and cancers of the liver, kidney, brain and testis. Cancer is the second leading cause of death for children under the age of twenty. Leukemia, brain and other childhood cancers have increased by more than 20% since 1975. The rise in childhood cancers is believed to be linked to environmental exposures of chemicals.

Firefighters are also at higher risk. It is also well documented that the disproportionately higher incidence of cancers in firefighters is due to the smoke from fires, made more toxic by the presence of flame-retardant and other chemicals. These chemicals get into their gear and are carried back to the fire station and into homes. A National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) study of cancer incidence among 30,000 career firefighters found higher rates of several types of cancer including mesothelioma and cancers of the esophagus, pharynx, stomach, kidney and others.

It is time to take action. Many manufacturers of residential upholstered furniture and children’s products have moved away from using flame retardants due to the change in California’s flammability standard, the abundance of research, state laws and public demand. It is time Connecticut take action to restrict these chemicals that harm human health and pose no benefit to society. We strongly urge your support of HB 6516.