

**Written Testimony from Rhonda Sherwood, Darien
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2013**

**In Support of
Raised Bill 3694 An Act Concerning Toxic Disclosures and Innovation for
Healthy Children
Raised Bill 3794 An Act Concerning Genetically Engineered Baby Food
Raised Bill 6332 An Act Concerning Toxic Fire Retardants in Children's
Products**

Dear Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and Honorable Members of the Committee on Children,

As a mother of three children and the vice chairman of the Mount Sinai Children's Environmental Health Center (CEHC), I want to express my support for the three aforementioned bills that would reduce or eliminate children's exposure to untested chemicals and genetically engineered foods in products sold or food consumed in Connecticut. Thanks to the extensive research Dr. Philip Landrigan, the chairman of the CEHC, has shared with me and other CEHC board members, it is obvious that certain chemicals in products we use every day are causing permanent, emotional and financial harm to children and young adults in Connecticut and the U.S.

Before my work at Mount Sinai, I used to think that products sold in stores like CVS, Stop and Shop and Toys R Us all had to pass a safety test or at least adhere to set of rules that made sure people who used a product would never come in harms way. Sadly this is not the case. For example, the scientists at Mount Sinai tell me that the pesticides sprayed on the foods my kids eat, technically known as organochlorine pesticides, are one of the chemicals they suspect are contributing to the increased incidence of autism and learning disabilities. The first thought that comes into my mind is why would the government allow untested chemicals to be sprayed on the food my growing children eat? That's why I think the RB 3694 makes so much sense. It would give me great peace of mind to know that products sold in Connecticut do not contain potentially harmful chemicals- ones like BPA, phthalates, flame-retardants, and endocrine disruptors. It would also make me happy to know that a scientific panel would create a list of cost effective alternatives to the harmful chemicals so as to not financially run a company into the ground.

Right now I go to great lengths to avoid certain products that contain harmful chemicals that I've learned about through my work at Mount Sinai. I don't use wrapped sticks of butter because when I sat next to Linda Birnbaum, the head of the NIEHS, at a dinner, she told me that testing in her labs showed they contained "extremely" high levels of flame retardants. I don't use any foods in cans, except ones made by Eden Organics, because of the BPA, a synthetic estrogen lining the cans that is linked to learning disabilities, obesity and breast cancer. I also avoid cleaning products and cosmetics because if they list the word "fragrance" or

“parfum” on the label, the scientists at Mount Sinai tell me there is over an 80% chance these products contain phthalates, which are a hormone disruptor linked to autism and learning disabilities. If I had a baby, I have the financial resources to buy a flame retardant free mattress but to my knowledge a flame retardant free car seat does not exist, which is a reminder that it is not possible to buy your way out of this field of chemical land mines. I take some comfort I can help protect my children’s health through my avoidance techniques, but what can an uninformed mother do if she doesn’t know?

In this economy, it is easy to take the position that we should want to preserve chemical industry jobs and minimize the inconvenience of switching food and chemical ingredients. But when you consider that:

- the incidence of childhood diseases like asthma has tripled over the last three decades,
- that one out of every 88 children born in the U.S. is affected by autism,
- that both childhood leukemia and brain cancer have increased in incidence by about 40% since 1970,

I bet that if you or your wife or your daughter were to become pregnant, you would want to learn more about which chemicals you or your loved one should avoid to prevent the likelihood of these diseases from ever happening. And even if you don’t know anyone who is pregnant, I think you would still want to reduce the enormous economic strain caused by childhood diseases. In their 2012 annual report, the CEHC tells us that our country spent \$76.6 billion on children’s disease of environmental origins- in health care, special education, and lost productivity.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the Committee on Children. I hope Connecticut will continue to be a leader in protecting our residents- young and old alike- from harmful chemicals and stop the rise in rates of autism, ADHD, asthma, cancer, and obesity.

Sincerely,

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