

**Written Testimony concerning H.706 - An act relating to banning the use of neonicotinoid pesticides on February 16, 2024 for the Vermont House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry.**

Fran Putnam  
Steering Committee Member  
Pollinator Pathway of Addison County

I am writing in support of H.706, a much-needed bill that has wide implications for Vermont's environment. Thank you for the amount of time this committee has spent on this important bill.

I am a founding member of the Pollinator Pathway of Addison County (PPAC). Our organization is made up of volunteers who are members of the national Pollinator Pathway organization, founded in 2017, which is active in over 300 towns in 11 states.

Our Vermont organization, PPAC, was founded in January, 2022, and has hosted numerous educational events, including experts that have educated the public on the importance of native pollinators to the environment. One of our advisors, Xerces Society entomologist Emily May, testified to this committee on February 14. I am here to amplify the importance of her testimony, and that of other scientists who have testified. I have studied the topic of the dangers of pesticides in some depth and have listened to the majority of the testimony before this committee on H.706.

One of the major goals of the national Pollinator Pathway is to create healthy habitat for native pollinators by promoting pesticide-free land-care. We at PPAC take this part of our mission very seriously and it's why I have chosen to testify.

I am writing as a concerned Vermonter who is speaking for native pollinators and for all those who wish to create a safer habitat for native pollinators.

Because our PPAC members value creating habitat for native pollinators (and by that I mean native insects, birds, butterflies, moths, and beetles), we are very concerned about the amounts of neonicotinoids present in our Vermont environment. We don't want to plant gardens that are anywhere near corn or soybean fields or other plants treated with neonics because we know from our own research and previous testimony that neonics move in the soil and water and drift through the air onto native plants growing nearby.

Because some bees can fly up to 5 miles to collect nectar and pollen, we know that many of the insects we're hoping to help are actually picking up neonics as they forage and fly. They are also picking up neonics in the water, the air, and especially in the soil, as referenced in Emily

May's testimony. Almost all native bees are ground-nesting, so the health of the soil is paramount to their health.

Right now, in Addison County, it can be difficult to find a place to plant a pollinator garden or protect native pollinator habitat that isn't within range of corn or soybean fields, playing fields, a neighbor's lawn, or a golf course that is treated with pesticides that endanger pollinators.

We also don't want to go to our local nurseries and buy ornamental plants treated with neonics. We can't be sure when we go to a local nursery if their plants are treated with neonics because the nurseries themselves aren't sure unless they are 100% organic. We have been told at numerous commercial nurseries that they source their plants from so many places that they can't be sure what pesticides might be in them or in the potting soil that contains them.

Our county, Addison County, was mentioned in Kent McFarland's recent testimony as a hotspot in Vermont for native pollinators and also a hotspot for corn and soybean fields. We are very concerned that continued use of these highly toxic neonics is harming the very native pollinators that should be so abundant here in our county, as well as in other parts of Vermont. Much of the testimony that you have been hearing so far bears this out.

Further, in Kent McFarland's testimony, he stated that 70% of our food crops are pollinated not by honeybees, but by native bees. Think tomatoes, blueberries, green beans, etc., all pollinated by native pollinators. Because those bumblebees and other native pollinators are in decline, it seems clear that our entire food supply is also threatened, both in the short term and the long term. We cannot afford to lose any more native pollinators!

Perhaps more importantly, the health of our entire ecosystems is threatened. From the smallest insect up the food chain to aquatic animals, birds, small and large mammals, and humans, we all depend on a healthy environment. If the insects at the bottom of the food chain are being harmed by pesticides, the entire ecosystem is harmed.

We aren't balancing beekeepers against dairy farmers, or honey against milk. We're balancing neonics against our entire natural systems, including plants, animals, soil, water, and air.

We are asking as concerned citizens that this committee take the danger of neonics to our environment into account, look broadly at the potential benefit of this bill, and join NY State, Quebec, Ontario, and the EU in phasing out neonic-treated agricultural seeds and foliar spraying of neonics on ornamentals and turf in Vermont.

We understand that neonics are not the only threat to pollinators and to our environment, but banning them would go a long way towards relieving the pressure on beneficial insects and other living things.

We support this bill and believe it is a much-needed safeguard for the health of Vermont's plants, animals, water, soil, and air.

Fran Putnam

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Pollinator Pathway of Addison County