

Testimony in Support of:

S. 239, An Act Relating to Regulating Toxic Substances

April 10, 2014

House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources

Nick Carter, Public Affairs Coordinator, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England

Chairman Deen and distinguished members of the Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources Committee,

The mission of PPNNE is to: provide, promote, and protect access to reproductive health care and sexuality education so that all people can make voluntary choices about their reproductive and sexual health. We provide our patients with a full range of primary and preventive reproductive health services in order to meet that mission.

As the largest reproductive health care provider in Vermont, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England is committed to educating ourselves and our patients about the dangers and health risks from exposure to harmful chemicals for women, men and their families.

As a trusted provider of health care to thousands of Vermonters every year, we've joined with other public health advocates including the Vermont Public Health Association, the American Cancer Society, the Vermont State Nurses Association and the Vermont Nurse Practitioner Association in calling for comprehensive chemical reform because we see a clear and immediate risk to Vermonters.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Society of Reproductive Medicine have recently issued a joint statement urging health care professionals to advocate for government policy changes to identify and reduce exposure to toxic environmental agents. This recommendation has been made a top priority for health care organizations across the country as there is robust evidence that exposure to certain toxic chemicals can increase the risk of miscarriage and stillbirth, impaired fetal growth, pre-term births and birth defects.

We've been proud to be involved in the positive steps the legislature has taken to reduce Vermonters' exposure to harmful chemicals by recent restrictions on toxic chemicals including BPA, flame retardants, lead, phthalates, and mercury. This bill is the next logical step to deal with this problem in a more thoughtful and systematic way. A safe environment, free of harmful chemicals, is critical to the health and welfare of all Vermonters.

Our health care professionals regularly see patients with some of the health issues that we know have been linked to toxic chemical exposure. Taking infertility as an example, while we know that the cause can be multi-factorial, it is unacceptable to us as a health care provider to not to do all that we can for our patients knowing that the anguish that they suffer could have been avoided through this sort of legislative effort.

Through our 11 health centers and thousands of patient visits, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England is committed to promoting reproductive justice and an individual's right to protect their reproductive health. S. 239 is an important step in supporting this right by providing the much-needed information about which products contain the most harmful chemicals. Men and women who are planning their families can thus ensure that the products they use on a daily basis do not hinder their ability to have a safe and healthy pregnancy and family.

Bottom line, this bill is a reasonable approach to identifying the chemicals we already know are harmful, giving Vermonters more information about where these chemicals are being used and moving to safer alternatives when they are available. This will in turn help push the industry toward the development of safer products. It is sound public health policy and the process outlined in the bill will ensure adequate stakeholder input.

There is no reason to delay action on this important issue. All Vermonters should be guaranteed that their own efforts to stay healthy aren't undermined by exposure to toxins they aren't even aware of. Planned Parenthood of Northern New England urges you to support S. 239.

Thank you for your time and all that you do for the state of Vermont,

Nick Carter,
Planned Parenthood of Northern New England