

Testimony in Support of:**S. 239, An Act Relating to Regulating Toxic Substances**

Testimony to Senate Health & Welfare Committee, January 30, 2014

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Senator Ayer and distinguished members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, my name is Ellen Starr, and I'm a Nurse Practitioner testifying on behalf of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England in support of S. 239, An Act Relating to Regulating Toxic Substances.

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.

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. It is sound public health policy.

As a trusted provider of health care to thousands of Vermonters every year, we've joined with other environmental and public health advocates in calling for this comprehensive chemical reform because we see a clear and immediate risk to Vermonters. In addition to the groups represented here today, 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.

Attention has rightly been given to the effects of these toxic chemicals on infants and children. The exposure of pregnant women and developing fetuses to chemicals in all kinds of products is critical to the health of developing babies as well. Exposure can increase the risk of miscarriage and stillbirth, impaired fetal growth, pre-term births and birth defects. This bill is a necessary step forward because it addresses toxic chemical exposure in an efficient manner and allows for adequate stakeholder input. A safe environment, free of harmful chemicals, is critical to the health and welfare of all Vermonters.

As a Nurse Practitioner, I routinely see patients with some of the health issues that we know have been linked to toxic chemical exposure. Taking infertility as an example, while I know that the cause can be multi-factorial, it is unacceptable for me as a health care provider to sit with a

woman and her partner 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.

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,

Ellen Starr, Nurse Practitioner
Planned Parenthood of Northern New England