



The Honorable David Durfee, Chairman
House Committee on Agricultural, Food Resiliency, and Forestry
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

RE: HB 739 – Prohibiting the Use and Sale of the Herbicide Paraquat (SUPPORT)

Dear Chairman Durfee and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (MJFF) and the millions of Americans impacted by Parkinson's disease, I urge you and the Committee to ensure the passage of HB 739 which would ban the sale and use of the toxic herbicide, paraquat in the state of Vermont. The Foundation's mission is to eliminate Parkinson's disease in our lifetime through an aggressively funded research agenda and ensuring the development of improved therapies for those living with Parkinson's. We also advocate for state and federal actions that benefit the health and welfare of people living with Parkinson's, their families and caregivers.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written correspondence. I am writing to highlight the urgent public health importance of eliminating paraquat exposures to help safeguard people from Parkinson's disease, the fastest-growing neurodegenerative disease in the United States and worldwide. The foundation stands ready to submit more in-depth testimony and to testify on the critical public health issues raised by paraquat's links to Parkinson's disease and to assist the committee members in any other way in their deliberations.

A Clear Case for Needed Action: Eliminating Paraquat's Use to Protect Public Health

Parkinson's disease is the fastest-growing neurodegenerative disease in the United States and the world, imposing an immense and rising human and economic toll on families, communities and public health systems. Preventing avoidable exposures to toxic chemicals that increase Parkinson's risk is therefore not only a matter of sound science, but of responsible governance.

First, paraquat is an exceptionally toxic pesticide that has been repeatedly and strongly linked to Parkinson's disease. Decades of epidemiological and experimental research show that people who live or work near paraquat application sites face a significantly increased risk of developing Parkinson's, and that paraquat exposure reproduces the very biological hallmarks that define the disease – oxidative stress, mitochondrial damage, chronic brain inflammation and the death of dopamine-producing neurons. More than 70 countries, including the entire European Union, Brazil and China, have concluded that paraquat's risks are unacceptable and have banned this toxic chemical to protect their people. Yet paraquat continues to be used in the United States, often manufactured by state-owned Chinese companies whose own government prohibits its domestic

use. This creates a very stark reality: foreign governments protect their citizens from paraquat while profiting from its use here.

Second, states have both the authority and the responsibility to act when federal protections fall short. From the founding of our nation, states have served as the on-the-ground guardians of public health, exercising their powers to prevent harmful exposures and respond to emerging threats. Federal pesticide law expressly preserves this authority, allowing states to go beyond minimum federal standards to protect their residents. This strong state tradition of action to protect public health is an expression of effective, evidence-based leadership and governance.

Third, protecting public health by eliminating paraquat exposures is completely compatible with robust, productive agriculture. Farmers across the United States already grow major crops – including cotton, soybeans, corn, apples, grapes, and almonds – without using paraquat. Countries that have banned paraquat continue to farm successfully and, in many cases, outproduce the United States in key agricultural outputs. The claim that paraquat is indispensable to agriculture is contradicted by real-world experience at home and abroad.

Conclusion: Protecting People Now Prevents Ongoing Dangerous Exposures

The scientific evidence linking paraquat to Parkinson's disease is extensive, compelling, and continues to grow, while the public health and economic costs of inaction are already staggering. States have both the authority and the responsibility to act when federal safeguards fall short, and states' long history of leadership in protecting public health – from water quality to toxic chemical regulation and safeguarding farming communities – demonstrates the effectiveness of these actions.

On behalf of the foundation and the patients we support, we urge a **favorable vote on HB 739**. Thank you for your time and consideration, please don't hesitate to contact me at zhardy@michaeljfox.org or policy@michaeljfox.org.

Sincerely,

Zach Hardy, Senior Regional Manager
State Government Relations
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research

CC: Representative Esme Cole, Bill Sponsor