

Vermont Senate Committee on Agriculture

In Support of H.739

Chair Ingalls, Vice Chair Major, and members of the committee — thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of H.739, which would prohibit the use and sale of the herbicide paraquat in Vermont.

My name is Ron McConnell. I live in Vergennes in Addison County, and I'm a Vermonter living with Parkinson's disease. On July 9, 2017, I suffered a toxic inhalation injury from chlorine gas. That was my last healthy day.

Before that day I spent over thirty years as a certified exercise physiologist and competitive athlete, helping people get stronger and healthier. I was running, jumping, and competing at a high level — until sixteen years of daily chemical exposure and that one day changed my life. My doctors at Dartmouth have confirmed that exposure caused my Parkinson's disease.

OSHA investigated my workplace because of my injuries, injuries to other employees, and the risk of toxic chemical exposure. They found severe violations and fined my employer.

I don't face Parkinson's alone. My wife Amy is my care partner. When I fall, she is the one who picks me up. Behind every person with Parkinson's is someone carrying a weight that most people never see.

I'm not here to tell you paraquat caused my disease. It didn't. But the science that connects my exposure to Parkinson's is the same science that connects paraquat to Parkinson's — toxic chemicals destroying the brain cells that control how we move and how we think. My toxic exposure happened at my workplace. Paraquat is being used on farms across the country.

The Environmental Protection Agency's own website says one sip of paraquat can kill you. There is no antidote. Farmers who use it face the greatest exposure — and 150% higher Parkinson's risk. The risk extends beyond the farm — a 2025 study found that people living within one mile of a golf course have more than double the risk of developing Parkinson's, likely from pesticide runoff. And the EPA just confirmed that paraquat drifts further through the air than they previously thought.

We are buying this chemical from countries that won't let their own farmers use it.

Parkinson's is the fastest growing neurological disease in the world. It costs this country over sixty billion dollars a year. There are approximately 2,730 Vermonters living with

Parkinson's disease — each one with a care partner, a family, a community affected. The direct and indirect costs to Vermont alone are estimated at over \$120 million annually.

Vermont uses very little paraquat. That's exactly why Vermont can lead the country. Banning it here costs our farmers almost nothing but tells the rest of the nation that someone was willing to go first. The House passed this bill unanimously. Twelve other states have bills on the table right now — including New York, right next door. Vermont has always led the nation on protecting people and the environment. This is our chance to do it again.

Stories like ours don't have to keep happening. That gives 1.2 million Americans with Parkinson's disease — and everyone who cares for them — hope.

My wife Amy and I would welcome the opportunity to speak with any member of this committee about our experience and why this bill matters. I urge you to act on H.739 before the session ends.

Best of health,

Ron and Amy McConnell

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