



January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026  
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**Chair Lyons and members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,**

My name is Anna Seuberling, environmental advocate with the Vermont Public Interest Research Group. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.26, a bill to prohibit certain artificial dyes in foods sold in Vermont schools.

VPIRG represents more than 20,000 members and supporters across every legislative district in Vermont. Our mission is simple: to protect public health, our environment, and our democracy.

I want to start with something basic: our food is making us sick. Most of what fills grocery store shelves today is ultra-processed food—stripped of nutrients and loaded with added sugars, sodium, unhealthy fats, and synthetic additives. These foods now make up an estimated [71% of the American food supply](#) and are a major driver of preventable diseases like [heart disease](#), [diabetes](#), and [cancer](#).

Many of these ultra-processed foods contain artificial dyes that offer no nutritional benefit and carry real risks—especially for children. [Research](#) has linked synthetic food dyes to hyperactivity and adverse behavioral effects. And yet, many of these chemicals haven't been meaningfully reviewed by the FDA in decades.

At a time when we [cannot rely on federal leadership](#) to hold powerful food manufacturers accountable, states must step up. Vermont has a long history of doing exactly that—and S.26 is a strong, commonsense starting point.

Importantly, this bill is also practical. The Vermont Agency of Education has confirmed that school meals programs would [not have difficulty](#) sourcing compliant products, noting that many manufacturers are already removing dyes in response to similar legislation passed in California.

As the committee continues work on S.26, we also encourage you to consider aligning it with existing House legislation, [H.260](#), which addresses other harmful food additives like brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, propylparaben, and Red Dye No. 3—chemicals linked to [cancer](#), [hormone disruption](#), and [reproductive harm](#). States like California and West Virginia have already acted in this space, demonstrating both feasibility and momentum.

S.26 is about protecting kids and taking this important step toward a healthier food system. VPIRG strongly supports this bill and urges the committee to continue advancing it this session.

Thank you for your time and your leadership.