



July 25, 2007

To the Joint Committee On Public Health
State Senator Susan C. Fargo
and State Representative Peter J. Koutoujian
Room 130, State House, Boston, MA 02133

Testimony in support of An Act to Reduce Asthma by Using Safer Alternatives to Cleaning Products (H2246, S 2201)

As a long time child health advocate, a member of the Massachusetts Healthy Schools Network, and an advisor to the National Healthy Schools Network, and as the environmental health consultant to the board of the MassPTA and its legislative VP, I believe this Act to Reduce Asthma should be part of every school's comprehensive wellness and health security policy.

1. Asthma is an acquired environmental disease. No one is born with asthma. The vapors of hazardous cleaners eat away at the airways and lead to asthma attacks that disrupt learning and sabotage school achievement.

2. We need to get smart about clearing the air and require the use of safer cleaning products that protect our children from preventable illness and disabilities.

The increasing rates of asthma means we are not doing a good job protecting young lungs from the air pollutants that cause chronic inflammation in the nose, sinuses and airways.

As an advocate, I hear too many stories of students sitting in poorly ventilated classrooms, helplessly choking when cleaners and disinfectant are sprayed at their desks, sometimes several times a day, even while they are eating their snack or lunch.

Students and teachers enter buildings where they cannot escape the vapors and fumes of harsh cleaning chemicals as well as other asthma triggers.

Just as our individual and public health is undermined by tobacco company advertising, we are victims of marketing campaigns that trick people into buying unsafe cleaning chemicals as well as the perfumed deodorizers and scented air fresheners. Especially in schools, people use these unsafe products to cover up the bad smells of mold or other signs of neglected maintenance and poor sanitation not realizing the respiratory and neurological damage they do.

These hazards are part of the Massachusetts Department of Health "A Breath Away" campaign warning about the hazards of inhalant abuse. These same products are just as dangerous to children when they are forced to breathe them at school.

Medicating children to mask the symptoms instead of stopping the exposures only opens the lungs to more permanent airway damage. It is like forcing your eyes open in a sandstorm.

And, all those costly medications and emergency room and doctor visits are expensive, causing

www.masspta.org
P.O. Box 421, Rehoboth, MA 02769
508-347-7055

hardship for families and unnecessarily burdening our communities, and health insurance and health care systems.

With this ***An Act to Reduce Asthma*** we can stop polluting their air with hazardous cleaners that redden their eyes, that make it hard for children to stay alert, to concentrate or sit still, that cause chronic sinus infections, and that cause asthma attacks, missed classroom time, and other disruptions that sabotage academic achievement.

Even students with no obvious signs of asthma can develop permanent airway inflammation from exposure to even low level but persistent irritants such as cleaning chemicals, making the lungs increasingly vulnerable to any additional irritant or allergen.

It is time to get smart. We urgently need ***An Act to Reduce Asthma*** to reform purchasing practices and cleaning practices in schools, day cares and hospitals. This reform will also serve as an important model to promote enlightened changes in the personal shopping choices that school staff and parents make for their classrooms and their homes.

I urge your support for ***An Act to Reduce Asthma*** because I believe that parents, educators, health professionals and legislators owe it to children to eliminate environmental hazards that are a source of preventable illness and disability.

Yours truly,

Ellie Goldberg, M.Ed., Massachusetts PTA Legislative Chair
79 Elmore Street, Newton, MA 02459-1137
617 965-9637

ellie.goldberg@gmail.com