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Testimony in Support
HB 229 – Pesticides – Use of Chlorpyrifos – Prohibition

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Submitted to: The Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee

Good afternoon Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, thank you for listening to a different perspective than you may have expected. I anticipate that opponents of the ban will likely characterize my testimony as “emotional” in order to dismiss it, but this is purely scientific and specific to Maryland.

My name is Whitney Ellenby, I’m the mother of a profoundly autistic 18-year-old son, and the founder of a venture that runs recreational events for over 800 families in Maryland impacted by Autism. When I began the events 11 years ago, I only had 15 families, but I now have over 800 and rising, with weekly referrals of at least 3 families with newly diagnosed children. As a parent who sees hundreds of families struggling to cope with their own autistic children, it’s frankly offensive to me that we are even having a debate about whether to ban chlorpyrifos, given the scientific facts you heard today and safer alternatives.

Here’s a staggering fact from the CDC -- **right here in Maryland, our state is now #2 in the nation for babies born with Autism (See Article below). And, in December 2018, a report based on a 2016 survey conducted by the National Survey of Children’s Health found that the current rate of Autism in the U.S. is actually one in 40 children.**

This is not a matter of defection to our state for better resources, this is babies born with their brains incurably warped by a disability that’s certain to have an environmental cause. Something is poisoning our children. And the link between chlorpyrifos established by EPA scientists, and increased risk of Autism is clear, which makes perfect sense when you think about what these pesticides are designed to do.

This chemical is proven to seize the spine and arrest the brain once it’s ingested – that’s how we kill the bugs. But now imagine what happens when it enters our water stream and food, so that pregnant women are ingesting it. Adult bodies may be better equipped to flush out a small dose of poison, but babies growing in the womb cannot. Imagine what this chemical designed to kill is doing to the developing brain of a child during gestation, especially in that first trimester when the brain is forming. Is that really a risk we want to take when they are safer alternatives? When studies *prove* that ingestion of chemicals like chlorpyrifos in pregnant women can maim babies’ brains?

In an age when everyone is frantic to figure out what is causing Autism, when it’s becoming clear that it’s an environmental trigger combined with genetics, we continue to apply chemicals that we

know for a fact are designed to cause injury and death. And we are now reaping what we have sowed because the damage can't be reversed, it happens when chlorpyrifos residue is in our food, water, and from direct exposure to applications and drift from our farms, golf courses, and other land care applications.

Here in a state we laud for being so enlightened and progressive, are we seriously willing to continue the use of poisons that reach our children's' brains?

As a resident of Montgomery County, I'm well aware that golf courses and fields with lush, green grass are using this chemical. Their argument in defense of this is that they don't use it all that often, as if that matters to parents like me, who will be caring for their disabled children for the rest of their lives. While those who advocate to use this toxic argue about it's necessity, I echo the common refrain of parents with incurably disabled brains – *I cannot die, I cannot get sick*, my son is aging into adulthood and I can't care for him forever, but he can't survive without me. The past couple years have been particularly acute because Zack developed aggressive behaviors, I was hit, bit and punched on an almost daily basis. My daughter has suffered depression in part because of the trauma she witnessed. What's extraordinary about my situation is how ordinary it is ~ every single day thousands of families in Maryland endure the identical struggles. Compare that to the dilemma of whether to continue applying a poison implicated in warping their brains.

As public servants, you are charged with keeping us safe. Knowing what we now know, allowing groups to continue to apply chlorpyrifos that leeches into our water and food is a dereliction of duty as far as I'm concerned. It's irrelevant how much poison results in which disabilities, how often companies apply it, we just need to know it's toxic and warping our children's brains.

Setting aside safety issues, consider economics. Maryland is #2 for incidence of Autism in the nation. **Our waitlist for receiving services off the Autism Waiver is over 7 years long, and there aren't enough homes to house our adults. How we are going to manage this expanding demographic and who do you think will pay for it? Maryland Taxpayers. We literally cannot afford for this disability to keep sweeping through our state, and today you have a chance to take an important step to halt it.**

The solution is simple, even if it's inconvenient to some business interests. **Our farms and golf courses and land care professionals have other options, safer ones, and we all know it. But I have no other option, the damage to my son's brain is irreversible.** We take a stand – we don't dare door risk anything that poisons our children. That is what's at stake, and that's the duty with which you have been charged. I'm confident you will do the right thing and give HB 229 a favorable report. Thank you.

MD Has 2nd Highest Autism Rates In America, CDC Says

A new report released by the CDC shows that autism rates in Maryland have jumped 10 percent in the past 14 years.

By [Deb Belt, Patch Staff](#)

Apr 28, 2018 2:29 pm ET



BALTIMORE, MD — Autism rates continue to climb nationwide, and Maryland is second in the country in the number of children with autism, according to a new study released by the Centers for Disease Control. The study used research collected by Rutgers University researchers and found that autism rates have gone up 10 percent in Maryland since 2004, and looks like they will continue to climb. Data released by the [CDC](#) finds that Autism Spectrum Disorders affect an average of 1 in 59 children in the U.S. (1 in 38 boys, 1 in 152 girls). The findings are based on 11 sites, including Maryland (which has an autism prevalence of 1 in 50; 1 in 31 for boys, and 1 in 139 for girls). The study focused on 8-year-olds.

One in 34 New Jersey children (three percent of all 8-year-olds) have autism, [the study found](#), the highest in the country. **Maryland has the second highest rate of autism, at one in 55, the CDC reports.**

"Pathfinders for Autism is deeply concerned by the implications the increasing numbers of children diagnosed with ASD will have on our over-burdened public school and adult service systems," said Maryland's largest group advocating for children with autism. **"Already, Maryland's public school system is unable to meet the needs of over 11,000 children with ASD.** Children with autism grow into adults with autism, many in need of supports. Our adult service system has thousands of adults with developmental disabilities on waiting lists for critical supports. Furthermore, health insurance plans continue to deny or simply not cover effective treatments and interventions leaving gaps in individuals' medical care and potentially diminishing their quality of life and long-term potential.

"While we commend the State of Maryland for their recent budget approval to open an additional 100 Autism Waiver slots, and 800 slots for those on the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Waiting List, thousands are still left in need of services," the group said. "Pathfinders for Autism strongly urges our state leaders to recognize that the rate of autism continues to rise year after year. Maryland needs to acknowledge the increasing demand on services and families and develop a plan to expand supports and services and adequate funding to address the need."

Researchers caution that high rates don't necessarily mean more children with autism live in Maryland. Instead, the data could mean that children with autism are more likely to be diagnosed if they live here, but there's not enough information to know for sure.

"Other states could be underestimating the rate of autism," said Dr. Walter Zahorodny, an Associate Professor at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and the lead investigator on the study.

The study also found that autism rates are the same among different ethnic groups, the first time there was no racial disparity in diagnosis rates. Researchers believe public awareness about autism is behind that change.

Nationwide, boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed than girls, compared to Maryland, in which boys are 4.5 times more likely diagnosed than girls.

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disability that can cause "significant social, communication and behavioral challenges," the CDC says. Those with autism might "communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged."

There is no medical test for autism; instead, it is diagnosed based on behavioral traits. Most people with autism are diagnosed as children, but some may be diagnosed as adults.

These behaviors may be a sign of an Autism Spectrum Disorder:

6-12 Month-Olds

- Infrequent or no babbling
- Lack of eye contact or smile
- No interest in looking at faces
- Unusual, high-pitched squeals

9-24 Month-Olds

- ANY signs of regression
- Infrequent response to social interactions
- Decreased eye contact
- Limited facial expressions
- Inconsistent response to name (in absence of hearing loss)
- No words by 16 months or no 2-word phrases by 24 months
- Uses other person's hand as a tool
- Limited use of gestures (especially pointing)
- Doesn't easily learn simple new interactive routines
- Echoing what others say without regular spontaneous speech
- Overly attached to unusual objects
- Repetitive or odd play or other behavior
- Odd sensory interests (fans, lights, spinning)
- Insistence on sameness; resistance to change

Find more information about families living with autism at www.pathfindersforautism.org.

Image via Shutterstock