February 28, 2024

RE : SUPPORT SB0723

I am writing to you not only as a dedicated school nurse but also as a steadfast advocate for the health and well-being of our youngest citizens. The introduction of SB0723 is a legislative step that I wholeheartedly support and urge you to consider with the utmost seriousness.

The necessity of such legislation becomes clear through the lens of my professional experiences. In my role, I have encountered the profound and lasting impacts of lead poisoning among students. The detrimental effects of lead and other heavy metals on children's health and cognitive development are well-documented, with lead exposure being linked to reduced IQ, attention-related behaviors, and poor academic achievement (Delgado, F. et.al, 2018). A study by Bellinger emphasizes that even low-level lead exposure is associated with decreased IQ and attentional capabilities in children, underscoring the critical need for preventing exposure from all sources, including food (Bellinger, D.C., 2008). A study by Sanders et.al consolidates findings from various studies, demonstrating that exposure to toxic metals in children is linked to increased risks of autism spectrum disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other neurodevelopmental disorders (Sanders, T., et.al, 2015). These are not mere statistics; they are lived realities of children – realities that could be mitigated through proactive measures like the proposed HB0097.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has underscored the significance of reducing exposure to toxic heavy metals, particularly for infants and young children who are most vulnerable to their adverse effects (Council on Environmental Health, 2016). The AAP's recommendations highlight the critical role of early intervention in preventing exposure to heavy metals, which can have irreversible impacts on children;s health and development. Public Health England (2019) has underscored the importance of reducing exposure to heavy metals from the earliest stages of life to prevent potential health impacts. Through the implementation of HB0097, Maryland has the opportunity to lead by example, taking decisive action to protect its youngest residents from the beginning of their lives.

Moreover, the requirement for public reporting and labeling envisaged by this bill is a step toward greater transparency and accountability in the food industry. It empowers parents and caregivers with the information to make informed choices about the foods they provide to their children. This level of transparency is crucial for fostering a culture of safety and trust between consumers and food manufacturers.

From the perspective of a school nurse who has seen the consequences of lead poisoning firsthand, the importance of this bill cannot be overstated. Every day, we strive to create a safe and nurturing environment for our children and students to learn and grow. By ensuring that the food they consume in their earliest months and years is free from harmful contaminants, we are laying a stronger foundation for their health, well-being, and educational access.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Forsythe RN MSN

Works Cited:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018). *Policy Statement: Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity*. Pediatrics, 138(1). This statement provides guidance on the prevention and management of lead exposure in children, emphasizing the role of public policy in protecting children's health.

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Council on Environmental Health. (2016). Prevention of childhood lead toxicity. *Pediatrics*, 138(1), e20161493. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides guidance on preventing lead exposure in children, highlighting the critical need for public health interventions to mitigate exposure risks.

Delgado, C., et.al. (2018) *Lead Exposure and Developmental Disabilities in Preschool-Aged Children*. Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 24(2), e10-e17(8)

Public Health England. (2019). *Guidance: Lead poisoning: guidance for health professionals*. This document offers comprehensive guidance on identifying and managing lead poisoning, including the importance of preventing exposure in children.

Sanders, T., Liu, Y., Buchner, V., & Tchounwou, P.B. (2015). Neurotoxic effects and biomarkers of lead exposure: a review. *Reviews on Environmental Health*, 30(1), 13-32.