

Maryland Children's Environmental Health Coalition

Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
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SB 268

Pesticide Regulations – Transfer to MDE

Support

INTRODUCTION

Maryland Children's Environmental Health Coalition (MD CEHC) is a group of children's advocates working collaboratively toward improving the lives of children in Maryland. Our coalition works to support and advocate for laws that address children's environmental health and well-being. MD CEHC recognizes the urgent need to address the growing issues surrounding the environment where our children live, play, and attend school. We are specifically concerned about protecting children from known hazards, and preventing new hazards, thus allowing our children to reach their full potential as contributing members of society.

Our Coalition strongly **SUPPORTS SB 268** Pesticide Regulations – Transfer to Department of the Environment. This bill would place the oversight of pesticides used in our homes, schools, and communities in the State agency whose scope includes oversight of toxins in Maryland and protection of Maryland's natural resources. SB 268 is consistent with our mission and goals as it addresses in law Maryland's effort to:

- **Eliminate environmental pollutants and prevents new hazards.**
- **Protect children** from health risks **by limiting exposure to highly toxic chemicals (i.e. pesticides) and addressing remedies.**
- Support research and **data collection about environmental hazards and health risks.**

MD CEHC believes that transferring the regulation of pesticides from the Department of Agriculture (MDA) to the Department of Environment (MDE) would provide expanded comprehensive protection to our children and our natural resources (i.e. air, water, soil) from exposure to known toxins, specifically to US Environmental Protection Agency registered hazardous pesticides, over 14,000 of which MDA registered for use in Maryland in 2021.

PESTICIDES and CHILDREN:

Pesticide exposure in our communities, schools and homes is a growing concern. There have been efforts made on many levels to protect children and their environment from exposure to known hazards. The evidence continues to mount and the data-gaps are now closing regarding the impacts of certain pesticides on children. Sadly, federal, state and local governments have been slow to enact protections even in light of the ever-growing research supporting the need for better protections from pesticide exposures. While more data is needed on the impacts of pesticides, there is sufficient preliminary evidence to warrant concern.

PESTICIDES in SCHOOLS:

MD CEHC strongly believes MDE enforcement and adherence to the 1997 Maryland School Integrated Pest Management Law (IPM) would ensure that our children receive the full protection intended by this groundbreaking legislation. We appreciate the enormous challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic public health crisis and believe that pesticide regulations under MDE would allow for safer school environments for our children, teachers, and staff when EPA- registered pesticides are further assessed by MDE, an agency with expertise on regulating toxic chemicals for use in schools. This includes disinfectants currently being used which are EPA registered pesticides shown to actually weaken the immune system and exacerbate current Covid-related respiratory symptoms.

MDE, has a history of creating advisory groups with medical and public health expertise in addition to having had such experts on their staff. MDE has had a track record that can be strengthened going forward to ensure the School IPM Law is properly being enforced and that the pesticides – if and when used in our schools -- and only when all non-toxic means have been shown to be unreasonable or exhausted as required by the law -- are truly enforced. Such oversight will ensure that finally, the IPM in Schools law that also requires parental notification prior to any application (with specific information on possible adverse health impacts), an agency approved county school **board of education policy** and **department of education plans** that align with the law are in place as the Maryland General Assembly intended in 1997. Transparency, verification, and compliance with the Maryland School IPM Law, specifically adopted to protect children and their school environment is necessary to ensure the measures taken meet current public health, science-based guidance on safer pest management in schools, something MDE will well equipped to ensure.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN:

As pesticide use exists where children live, work (attend school) and play (our communities), an agency whose priority is agriculture and supporting farmers in Maryland does not align with protection children and their environmental health. We believe an agency whose focus is protecting public health and our environment from known toxins would be better able to protect children from pesticides allowed for use in the State of Maryland.

Maryland parents are also concerned about the health of the watershed including ground water accessed by wells for drinking water in homes and schools. Concern is not only because these are sources of drinking water, but also because these are the waterways where their children live, learn and play. The health effects of such exposures as detailed in the Report by the MDE and Maryland Department of Health (MDH) entitled Maryland Children and the Environment¹ are noted in the forward;

"It is well-recognized that the health of children is directly related to the environment generally and to specific environmental factors...Perhaps no single factor is more important to these efforts than reliable, accurate information that enhances the public understanding and supports the development of effective prevention efforts".

SB 268 is about meeting the health and environmental protection needs of all Maryland children. The State agency whose primary focus is protection should be the agency that oversees hazardous pesticides, which are designed to kill living things and are a known hazard to children's health.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge is power – here the power to protect children. MDE has the knowledge and expertise to protect our children from hazardous pesticides. MDE is the agency best equipped to address the issues related to pesticide use in Maryland.

We support all efforts to protect the most vulnerable, infants and children, from known hazards, which is consistent with MDE's mission.

We hope that the Committee acts swiftly and favorably on **SB 268**.

¹ Maryland Children and the Environment; State of Maryland (DHMH & MDE);

url: <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/OEHFP/EH/Shared%20Documents/CEHPAC/Report-2008-FINAL.pdf> accessed 1/30/22