



Massachusetts Public Health Association

Testimony by the Massachusetts Public Health Association in support of *An Act to Reduce Asthma and Other Health Threats From Cleaning Products used in Schools, Hospitals, Day Care Centers, and Pubic Housing (S.694 & H.2966).*

July 16, 2003

On behalf of the members and Board of the Massachusetts Public Health Association, we strongly urge the Joint Committee on Health Care to recommend House Bill No. 2966/Senate Bill No. 694 move to the full General Court. Massachusetts can make a significant difference in the quality of our indoor air and the health of our children, cleaning workers, and the general public by enacting this cost-effective and common sense measure.

Several recent studies have documented that cleaning workers suffer among the highest rates of occupational asthma, certain types of cancer, and are at increased risks for reproductive problems and poor birth outcomes. Many traditional cleaning products and disinfectants contain harmful substances (such as sodium hydroxide, hydrochloric and phosphoric acid, and butoxyethanol) that contribute to poor indoor air quality and cause cancer, reproductive disorders, respiratory ailments (including occupational asthma), eye and skin irritation, central nervous system impairment, and other human health effects. Hospitals also use a variety of methods to disinfect and sterilize surfaces and equipment, such as glutaraldehyde and ethylene oxide, that have been shown to cause serious health effects. In the home, our increased reliance on anti-bacterial soaps and detergents enhances the ability of bacteria to resist antibiotics, and poses a long-term threat to wildlife and to human health.

Given the availability of cost-effective and safe alternatives that offer effective disinfection and the long-term costs of treating chronic diseases such as those linked to unhealthy cleaning products, it makes little sense for Massachusetts to add to its health care burden by allowing such dangerous products to remain in circulation.

The Bill makes even more sense when we consider that a regulatory framework to further marginalize such unhealthy products *is already in place*. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health already administers a program – the successful Environmentally Preferable Products Program – that has *already selected a list of modern cleaning products which have been checked for safety and efficacy*, including forbidding any ingredients which are carcinogens or which are known to cause reproductive toxicity, or to contribute to poor indoor air quality. The products are also tested for effectiveness and a state bulk purchasing contract is already available for potential vendors.

The Healthy Cleaners Products Act simply expands on this existing program by giving authority to the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health to create a list of healthy cleaning products and cleaning practices that must be used **where children are especially vulnerable**. The bill mandates that no cleaning product may be used in schools, hospitals and other health care facilities, day care centers, public buildings, and public housing unless the product is included on the “Healthy Cleaning Products” list established annually by the Commissioner.

Massachusetts is a national leader in protecting our children from toxic hazards. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the first entity to develop new bid specifications based largely on the Green Seal Standard for Industrial and Institutional Cleaners (GS-37) which several states and local governments recently agreed to use as a model for procuring safer cleaning products. The entire program would be funded through a reasonable fee on manufacturers of toxic cleaning products.

The Bill represents a self-financing and highly effective public health intervention. Massachusetts must continue to be a national leader in protecting the public from the hazards of toxic cleaning products by taking these small steps that build on our existing protections and ensure that all facilities where children live and play use safe cleaning products. Thank you for consideration of this important Bill.