

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
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Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Claire McCaskill
144 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Hagan
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
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The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
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The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
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The Honorable Olympia Snowe
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mary Landrieu
431 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

October 24, 2012

Dear Senators,

Our health organizations have an interest in diseases and disabilities that affect women and children, including breast and lung cancers, infertility and endometriosis, birth defects, asthma, and learning and developmental disabilities such as autism and ADHD. We truly appreciate the leadership that you bring to issues that involve women's and children's health.

In light of that leadership, we write to urge that you co-sponsor the Safe Chemicals Act – a common sense policy that would require chemical makers to show that their chemicals are safe before using them in everyday products. The Act also would prioritize chemicals for swift action, providing a quick “green light” to many chemicals that are safe, while identifying and removing from commerce those chemicals that most clearly threaten people's health, with an emphasis on protecting the developing fetus and children.

As voted out of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, the Safe Chemicals Act has been substantially amended to address industry concerns. These changes reflect several years of discussion with chemical makers, and include changes to how new chemicals would be addressed and to the protection of confidential business information. Many of these changes are troubling to our organizations, but we believe that the key aspects of the Act remain intact and we recognize that compromise is essential to passing this legislation.

In the decades since the Toxic Substances Control Act was enacted, we have seen an increase, in some cases a dramatic increase, in the number of American women and children struggling with the diseases and disabilities listed above, such as breast cancer,

infertility, endometriosis, asthma and autism. In fact, everyone knows a child with autism, a woman fighting breast cancer, a young couple struggling to become pregnant. Mounting scientific evidence shows that toxic chemicals, interacting with genetics, are contributing factors in each of these serious and chronic conditions.

In particular, we are gravely concerned with the extreme vulnerability of the developing fetus, infants and children to toxic chemical exposures. Scientists have learned that the developing brain and body are much more susceptible to toxic substances than adult systems, and that chemical exposures *in utero* can have a profound effect at levels once thought to be safe. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has shown that children often have the highest levels of toxic chemicals in their bodies.

The brominated flame retardants provide an excellent example of how certain toxic chemicals can do lasting harm to the developing fetus. As detailed in the *Chicago Tribune's* investigative series in May, pounds of these flame retardant chemicals are added to sofas and chairs but turn out not to prevent fires.

A landmark 2010 study provided the first evidence from human data of adverse effects of these chemicals on human brain development, corroborating hundreds of laboratory results. Researchers tracked more than 300 women who gave birth in New York City in 2001 and 2002. A decade of follow-up testing shows that the children exposed to higher levels of the flame retardant chemicals in the womb have delays in mental and physical development, as measured at 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 years old. The effects of prenatal exposure to toxic chemicals are going with these children to school, which is nothing short of tragic.

It is also preventable! A woman who is pregnant can move away from someone smoking a cigarette. But she cannot do anything to protect her developing baby from toxic chemicals in her couch or car seat or cleansers. We need the Senate to do its part to protect American families and children from toxic chemical exposures.

Sen. Mikulski recently stated that the women of the Senate “work on macro issues and macaroni and cheese issues.” Enacting stronger regulation of toxic chemicals is both. The Safe Chemicals Act is a long overdue public health statute that would reduce risk factors for disease and disability for every single child born in this country. It also would help to reduce health care costs as well as education costs and losses due to lost work time. It's a mac 'n cheese issue too – one that regular moms worry about every day, as they struggle to find safer choices for their kids despite a dearth of information on chemicals in products.

We urgently ask that the women of the Senate lead their colleagues by taking action without further delay to co-sponsor and pass the Safe Chemicals Act. As health advocates, as parents and grandparents, we thank you.

Sincerely,

Katie Huffling, RN, MS, CNM, Director of Programs
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

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Lorrie Kline Kaplan, CAE, Executive Director
American College of Nurse-Midwives

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American Nurses Association

Diane Skalko, President
American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Monica Kraft, MD, President
American Thoracic Society

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Forward Together (formerly Asian communities for reproductive justice)

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Gwendolyn Lee, Executive Director
The Arc of Anchorage

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The Arc of the United States

Cc:

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Maria Cantwell
The Honorable Diane Feinstein
The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
The Honorable Patty Murray