



Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment

In support of Senate Bill 543 – February 14, 2023

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Beyond Toxics and the thousands of Oregonians who support our work across the state, I'm writing to express strong support for SB 543. Beyond Toxics is an Oregon-based statewide nonprofit providing leadership to build a community-driven environmental justice movement for a thriving and just Oregon.

I urge your full support for SB 543 which, if passed, will eliminate polystyrene foam foodware and prohibit the sale and distribution of foodware containers containing perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly referred to as PFAS.

This testimony will focus on PFAS chemicals from a public health and environmental justice impacts perspective. Passing SB 543 is a necessary step in prioritizing human health and equity.

PFAS substances are a class of highly toxic, manmade chemicals used in common household items and grease-resistant food packaging. PFAS are called “forever chemicals” because they are nearly indestructible and persistent toxic compounds in the environment, contaminating everything from drinking water to food and food packaging, to human blood and breast milk. They never break down in the environment, including in our own bodies. Their use in food packaging is a common source of PFAS food contamination and human ingestion.

PFAS carry toxicity at extremely low levels and thus are significant threats to human and environmental health. PFAS are linked to several health risks including but not limited to: cancer (specifically kidney and testicular cancers), hormonal endocrine disruption, liver problems, thyroid problems, reproductive harms, and birth defects. Research shows that exposure to some PFAS can result in bioaccumulation of the substances in our bodies, meaning that even low levels of exposure will compound on past exposure and grow over time.ⁱ

According to the Center for Disease Control and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, exposure to low doses of PFAS may impact the immune system. A National Toxicology Program review found that exposure to perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) is an immune hazard to humans.ⁱⁱ

There are environmental justice concerns related to PFAS, both in consumer products and in drinking water. Communities with environmental justice concerns are disproportionately harmed by PFAS, starting with manufacturers, such as Dupont and 3M, who intentionally

released PFAS into streams and rivers.ⁱⁱⁱ These manufacturers are clustered in communities of color that have historically dealt with the burden of disproportionate harm by industrial pollution. These communities are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as immune suppression, diabetes and cancer, and exposure to PFAS compounds their vulnerability due to their highly toxic chemical profile.

Day-to-day PFAS exposure also occurs by using and eating food in grease-resistant paper, fast food containers/wrappers, microwave popcorn bags, pizza boxes, and candy wrappers. For families located in working class and low-income neighborhoods with less access to grocery stores and healthy foods, these cheap, fast foods may make up a large part of their diet.

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that babies can be exposed to PFAS during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.^{iv} PFAS exposure is linked to having a baby born with reduced birth weight. In the U.S., the rate of low birthweight is 13% for Black babies, nearly twice the 7% rate for white babies.^v A baby who is very small at birth may have trouble eating, gaining weight and fighting off infections. Some may have long-term health problems.

Several environmental pollutants, including PFAS chemicals, readily pass to the infant through mother's milk, which has enormous implications for children's health. Exposure to PFAS is suspected of decreasing vaccine response in children, including the COVID-19 vaccine^{vi}. This has implications for communities of color, who are at increased risk for experiencing serious illness if they become infected with coronavirus due to inequities in health care, higher workplace exposures and patterns of underlying chronic health conditions compared to Whites.^{vii}

As the saying goes, we've got to do more to "turn off the tap" – this can start with banning the use of PFAS and phasing out polystyrene foam in foodware containers. It is an impactful and critical action Oregon can take now. SB 543 will result in reducing exposure to PFAS for Oregonians, and eventually reduce the need to manufacture these forever chemicals.

Beyond Toxics urges the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment to take urgent action to remove forever chemicals and polystyrene foam from food ware containers. For the health of our children, we cannot afford to wait for other states or the federal government to step up. I urge your support for SB 543.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ Environmental Health News, *What are PFAS?*, https://www.ehn.org/what-are-pfas-2656619391.html?gclid=CjwKCAiAioifBhAXEiwApzCztrvq4tg7mXuIR0wGz5WnA2PsUcEwoat5faBY_3QsrDFCAVQbW4RIEBoCwdIQAvD_BwE.

ⁱⁱ The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. *What are the Health Effects of PFAS?* Accessed at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/index.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Union of Concerned Scientists, *Abandoned Science, Broken Promises*, Oct 23, 2019. Accessed at https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/abandoned-science-broken-promises?_gl=1*x02nyw*_ga*NDkwMTE5NzU4LjE2NzYyNTkyODI.*_ga_VB9DKE4V36*MTY3NjI1OTI4MS4xLjAuMTY3NjI1OTI4MS4wLjAuMA

^{iv} American Academy of Pediatrics, Council on Environmental Health. *Breast Milk*. In: Etzel, RA, ed. *Pediatric Environmental Health*, 4th Edition; Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2019.

^v March of Dimes. Accessed at <https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/birth/low-birthweight>.

^{vi} The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. *What are the Health Effects of PFAS?* Accessed at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/index.html>.

^{vii} Kaiser Family Foundation, *Communities of Color at Higher Risk for Health and Economic Challenges due to COVID-19*. April 7, 2020. Accessed at <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/communities-of-color-at-higher-risk-for-health-and-economic-challenges-due-to-covid-19/>