



TO: Senate Committee on Education  
FR: Ira Cuello-Martinez, PCUN  
RE: Support for SB 426

February 21, 2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Ira Cuello-Martinez and I am the policy and advocacy director at PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. I am testifying on behalf of PCUN in strong support of SB 426.

For far too long, our members have endured damaging pesticide exposures in our jobs, in our communities, in our food, and in our water. Oregon farmworkers have historically been disproportionately exposed to and harmed by pesticides. The issue of pesticides is one of PCUN's ongoing priorities and we feel strongly about protecting our children from pesticide exposures during the years that they are growing and developing.

SB 426 will enable Oregon schools to **invest in the least toxic methods of pest control to protect the health of our children**. Oregon passed the Schools Integrated Pest Management law in 2009 which requires schools to carefully and effectively manage pesticide applications on school grounds while striving to reduce pesticide applications. However, this essential program has been an unfunded mandate for 14 years.

This intentional lack of funding to reform practices allows for disparities in pesticide exposure and the threat of harm in everyday life. This has a direct impact on environmental justice communities. For PCUN members, funding school IPM is not simply a pesticide issue, but a broader public health and human rights issue.

A study conducted in Oregon found that our children, particularly those whose families live and work in rural areas near commercial farms and agriculture businesses, have higher levels of pesticide metabolites in their urine.<sup>1</sup> Other studies conducted in Oregon found evidence of the association between low levels of pesticide exposure and deficits in neurobehavioral performance.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of 15 agricultural counties in California found Latinx children were also 91% more likely than white children to attend a school where the highest amount of

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<sup>1</sup> Lambert, W. et al., *Variation in Organophosphate Pesticide Metabolites in Urine of Children Living in Agricultural Communities*. Environmental Health Perspectives, April 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Rothlein, J., Rohlman D., et al, *Organophosphate Pesticide Exposure and Neurobehavioral Performance in Agricultural and Nonagricultural Hispanic Workers*. Environmental Health Perspectives, May 2006.

pesticides for human health concerns was used nearby. Eight-year-old Latinx children in low-income households in North Carolina were exposed to an average of 5.7 different pesticides in a three-month timeframe, with the specific pesticide exposures differing based on whether they lived in a rural or urban area.<sup>3</sup>

This is an unfair toxic burden on our communities. Even in small amounts, pesticide exposures put children at higher risk of adverse health effects. Children are more susceptible to the effects of environmental toxins like pesticides because they are still in the developmental stage of life. With children of color more likely to be exposed to pesticides, they are not only more susceptible but more vulnerable to chemical harm. **Children of color are therefore the most vulnerable and will often be the most at-risk population.**

We also see this as an equity issue around data transparency. Our parents should not have to file public records requests to get access to pesticide application records, nor pay fees to see records that should be always available on a school website or in the school office, or find it difficult to understand how their school district plans to reduce pesticide use and expand non-toxic or least toxic alternatives.

Out of nearly 200 Oregon school districts, less than 50% have updated their IPM Plan in the past 5 years and 11% do not have an IPM Plan on their district website. As we see it, 61% of schools are out of compliance with this critical responsibility, which could result in unintentional yet dangerous pesticide exposures to children.

Like so many families, our members value their family time together on the weekends and use school grounds for recreation or organized sports. We want our schools to fully comply with requirements to notify, post and keep accurate records of any pesticide uses. We want to feel safe when we take our children to school playgrounds and fields on the weekends.

A strong school IPM implementation plan is also safer for our community members who serve as teachers, administrators, and facility maintenance workers when school districts have the necessary resources to implement School IPM fully.

Schools should be a toxic-free place that is safe for our children to learn and play. Let's acknowledge the challenges schools (and workers) face to deal with pests with safe, toxics-free, and accountable methods. We urge you to support SB 426 and help end fourteen years of School IPM being relegated to an unfunded mandate.

Ira Cuello-Martinez  
Policy and Advocacy Director  
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<sup>3</sup> Arcury TA, et al. Pesticide exposure among Latinx children: comparison of children in rural, farmworker and urban, non-farmworker communities. *Sci Total Environ.* 2021;763:144233.