



February 19, 2025

Chair Neron, Vice-chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the 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 HB 2684, Toxic Free Schools.

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.

HB 2684 requires school Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plans to be reviewed, updated, and readopted by school district governing bodies every five years to ensure compliance with state and federal pesticide laws. It will also require school districts to make IPM plans publicly available on school websites and it will add school gardens to the definition of school campuses. For PCUN members it is important to highlight that steps are being taken to strengthen policy and transparency around chemicals used for pest control. This is not just a pesticide issue, but a broader environmental justice, 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 urine¹. Other studies conducted in Oregon found evidence of the association between low levels of pesticide exposure and deficits in neurobehavioral performance.² 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 pesticides for human health concerns were 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.³ This is an unfair toxic burden on our communities.

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

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

³ 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.

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 information that should already be 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.

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 take steps to have a strong IPM plan in place. Schools should be a toxic-free place that is safe for our children to learn and to play.

On behalf of PCUN and our members, I urge you to support HB 2684.

Ira Cuello-Martinez
Policy and Advocacy Director
PCUN