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Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Arc of Massachusetts, I urge you to support S2481, An Act to Promote Safer Alternatives to Toxic Chemicals, and to facilitate its passage through the Legislature. This legislation, which passed the Senate on January 29 and is currently in the House Ways & Means Committee, is co-sponsored by over half of your colleagues in the House.

In recognizing the growing amount of research linking developmental and intellectual disabilities to hazardous environmental toxins, The Arc has joined the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow (AHT), a coalition of environment, health, faith and labor groups, to seek preventive action on toxic hazards.

Our decision to join with AHT is the result of our belief that current environmental and health policies are inadequate. Currently, we believe, these policies are failing to address the degree that toxic substances are entering our bodies without our knowledge or consent.

The tragic histories of lead and mercury in this country, for example, demonstrate the harm caused when government and industry do not take action to protect public health. We have also seen that acting on early warnings can prevent widespread harm, as in the case of the drug thalidomide. AHT has established itself as a strong grassroots advocacy organization in large part because its agenda is driven by core beliefs in rigorous science, individual and corporate responsibility as well as progress and innovation. Last year, AHT delivered 25,000 cards from constituents across Massachusetts to legislators and the Governor in support of this bill.

We appreciate that there remains an uncertain link between some environmental toxins and disabilities. However, there are many firm conclusions that have been established including:

- Children whose mothers ate fish contaminated with PCBs were more than three times as likely to perform poorly in IQ and attention span tests than those with lower exposures to this chemical.
- The U.S. National Academy of Sciences estimates that at least 25% of learning and behavioral disabilities are due to either known toxic substances or the interactions between environmental factors and genetic predispositions.
- Perchloroethylene, a common dry cleaning agent, causes neurological effects like headaches, impaired memory, and reduced concentration and intellectual function.
- Children exposed to pesticides present in their mother's blood and breast milk reveal persistent, measurable intellectual impairment.
- PBDE, which is used as a flame retardant and has been linked to decreased thyroid hormone, has been found in the breastmilk of women across the country.

Local Chapters: Arc Community Services • Berkshire • Brockton Area • Cape Cod • Central Middlesex • Charles River • East Middlesex
Greater Boston • Greater Fall River • Greater Lawrence • Greater New Bedford • Greater Plymouth • Greater Waltham • Minute Man AHS
Northern Bristol • North Shore • Northern Essex • South Norfolk • South Shore • Southern Worcester • The United Arc

As you may be aware, the Safer Alternatives bill is modeled after Massachusetts' highly successful Toxics Use Reduction Act of 1989, which encourages a reduction in the amount of toxins used in Massachusetts and the amount of toxic byproducts generated. The proposed expansion of the legislation would set up an ongoing program whereby toxic chemicals used in manufacturing, products and services that are linked to serious health conditions would be researched to establish whether there are safer alternatives available. If an economically feasible safer alternative is found for a particular use, the program would assist businesses in making a transition to the safer alternative. This legislation is both practical and flexible. It would protect the people of Massachusetts while also ensuring that our businesses continue to enjoy economic stability and prosperity.

One of the key outcomes of this legislation would be to assist Massachusetts businesses to meet the more health-protective standards found in many other countries and states, as well as in some international corporations that are moving rapidly away from the use of toxic chemicals. California, Washington and Maine have all taken action recently to ban products containing some of the same toxic chemicals that may be addressed by this bill. Unlike other chemical bans, the Safer Alternatives bill takes the approach of requiring substitution only when a feasible safer alternative is available. It also supports Massachusetts businesses with research and technical assistance and provides financial support for business transitions when necessary.

We respectfully request that you support this bill and work with your colleagues to ensure that a House vote is scheduled in a timely manner and to ultimately pass the Safer Alternatives bill into law this session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leo V. Sarkissian".

Leo V. Sarkissian
Executive Director