

Testimony in Support of:  
S.247, An Act Relating to Bisphenol A

March 11, 2010

**Senate Health and Welfare Committee**

Senator Racine and distinguished members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, my name is Dr. Cheryl Gibson and I am the Medical Director for Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE) and a Clinical Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Vermont College of Medicine. I am pleased to be submitting testimony in support of S.247.

The mission of PPNNE is to: provide, promote, and protect access to reproductive health care and sexuality education so that all people can make voluntary choices about their reproductive and sexual health. In support of Vermont women and families PPNNE provides our patients with a full range of reproductive health services including cervical, breast, and testicular cancer screenings, as well as follow-up services for abnormal Pap tests, preconception education and prenatal referrals, and comprehensive yearly exams for women of all ages. PPNNE has 13 health centers all across Vermont and last year we provided reproductive health care to nearly 23,000 patients in over 34,000 visits. We work to maintain Vermont's low teen pregnancy rate, diagnose cancer, prevent, detect, and treat sexually transmitted diseases, and address other basic health needs like promoting healthy pregnancies and health families.

It is becoming increasingly clear to those of us who work for reproductive justice — who have long fought for a woman's right to control her reproductive destiny — that we must begin to turn our attention to the environmental toxins that are affecting the ability of couples to become pregnant, have a healthy pregnancy, and give birth to a healthy child. PPNNE believes that it is our responsibility as a health care organization to help our patients make the link between human health and the products we put in our bodies, on our bodies, and in our homes. We also believe that it is appropriate and responsible for our government to do its part as well by working to eliminate these toxins from our environment and communities and require manufacturers to offer safer alternatives to the products that Vermont women and families use every day. For these reasons, PPNNE is proud to support this bill and would urge the committee to join us.

The complex interplay between toxins found in the home, and women's endocrine, reproductive, nervous, and immune systems are only beginning to be understood, but the warning signs are clear. That's why PPNNE joins with other environmental and health advocates in calling for the phase out of Bisphenol A (BPA) in reusable food or beverage containers and in infant formula or baby food that is stored in a plastic container, jar or can in favor of safer alternatives. A safe environment, free of harmful chemicals is critical to the health and welfare of women, children, and Vermont communities as a whole.

Definitive data linking BPA exposure to specific pathological conditions in humans are not yet available. I'm sure you know we can't test these toxicants on people because it would be unethical. However, some of the adverse effects in animal studies are observed at levels of exposure close to those common in people. We use animal models and studies routinely as we

test new medications because we understand that we would likely experience the same toxicities that animals do. For this reason, clinicians, scientists and consumers are concerned, even if the effects are not yet clearly documented in humans. More than 200 studies have found evidence that BPA exposure is linked to a high number of health problems, including infertility, miscarriage, and breast and prostate cancer. Exposure to BPA during pregnancy, infancy, and childhood is a particular concern to scientists. Exposure to BPA begins before birth, when the risk is greatest. BPA has been found in blood samples from developing fetuses as well as in placental tissue. BPA has also been found in breast milk, which confirms the presence of this environmental estrogen in the target organ for breast cancer. BPA is one of the most pervasive chemicals in modern life. More than 2 million pounds of BPA are produced in the United States each year, and several times that amount is produced globally. Given the strength of the emerging data, many experts believe that it is prudent to recommend now that patients reduce BPA exposure and to provide clinicians with tools to help patients reduce their risk of exposure.

BPA is found in the lining of metal food cans and in some plastic food containers, including some baby bottles, water bottles, microwave ovenware and eating utensils. Because BPA is an unstable polymer and is fat-seeking, it can leach into infant formula and other food products, especially when heated. Once in food, BPA can move quickly into people - a real concern for women of childbearing age and for young children. At PPNNE's fall conference on women's environmental health, Janet Gray, editor of the Breast Cancer's Fund State of the Evidence, illustrated how BPA in food containers can affect our health. Please take a moment and picture three petri dishes in a laboratory. When estrogen was added to breast cancer tumor cells in a petri dish, the tumor cells divided and grew. When BPA was added to breast cancer tumor cells in a petri dish, the tumor cells divided and grew. When liquid from a bpa-lined can of string beans was added to breast cancer tumor cells in a petri dish, the tumor cells divided and grew.

The Vermont Body Burden Study released last month found BPA in every participant and levels of the chemical in three of the six participants exceeded the national norm. CDC Researchers also found BPA in 95% of 400 urine samples from a broad national sample of adults.

S.247 is an important step in providing the much needed information about what products these harmful chemicals are in so that men and women who are planning their families can ensure that the products they use on a daily basis do not hinder their ability to have a safe and healthy pregnancy and family.

If these chemicals, and any other that have been shown to cause harm to women and families, are in the products that we use everyday we are running the risk of increased infertility and problematic pregnancies. Ultimately, working on a chemical by chemical basis is not the safest or most efficient way to protect our reproductive health. Eliminating BPA should be part of a precautionary approach in which chemicals are tested for safety before they are marketed and untested or unsafe chemicals are not released in to the environment. This will be a key step in helping all of us protect our reproductive health and the health of our children now and in the future. This bill is a common-sense first step to getting toxic chemicals out of everyday products, getting important chemical information into the hands of consumers and retailers, and engaging market forces to encourage innovation and safer technology.

I urge this committee to pass this important bill and send it on to the full Vermont Legislature.

Thank you.