

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL**

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

**OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL PRESIDENT**

Dear Mr. Ingram,

Thank you for your message regarding Bill 52-14, which would restrict the use of certain cosmetic pesticides that are most dangerous to human health, and have been linked to a wide-range of diseases.

After spending more than year educating myself on the latest science involving pesticides and their impact on public health, I came to the conclusion that certain pesticides pose a very real threat to people of all ages, but especially to children. The developing brain is uniquely vulnerable. The American Academy of Pediatrics, among many other respected institutions of health and science, reports that even low-level exposure to these pesticides can cause permanent brain and nerve damage in children, and result in pediatric cancers, decreased cognitive function and behavioral problems such as ADHD. This measure seeks to minimize potential exposure to toxic pesticides in the places where children are most likely to encounter pesticides, namely, lawns and athletic fields. Pesticides absolutely have value when they are used to protect public health, the environment, or our food supply, and it is not the intent of Bill 52-14 to restrict such uses, but when pesticides are used solely to improve the appearance of landscapes, they can cause more harm than good.

Many people assume that because these products are reviewed by the EPA and sold on store shelves that they must be safe, but the federal government's Government Accountability Office (GAO) has found that many pesticides are currently being approved for consumer use by the EPA without receipt and review of data that the manufacturer is required to provide on the safety of the chemicals. Alarmingly, in some cases the manufacturer was given two years to submit studies on the effects of a pesticide, and ten years later no studies had been received or reviewed by the EPA. In the absence of reform on the federal level, I believe it would be irresponsible not to act now on the local level.

I am sensitive to the concerns from lawn care companies that this legislation could impact their business; however, following the enactment of restrictions on cosmetic pesticides in several Canadian provinces, the number of lawn care companies actually grew, as did the number of employees employed by each individual business. There is every reason to believe that the same will hold true in Montgomery County.

Lawn care does not have to be poisonous to people, pets, wildlife, or our waterways. Through proper management of the soil, along with the use of natural, organic alternatives to synthetic pesticides, a high quality landscape can be achieved. Furthermore, once established, an organic lawn program can result in significant savings to homeowners compared to a conventional chemical lawn care program because the soil is healthier, and thus more naturally resistant to disease, drought and weeds.

The bill balances the rights of homeowners to maintain a beautiful, healthy lawn with the rights of residents who prefer to not be exposed to chemicals that have known health effects. For example, the bill completely exempts areas of private property where children are less likely to encounter toxic pesticides, such as gardens and agricultural land. In addition, the bill would not restrict the use of any pesticide that is used to promote public health and safety, like managing noxious weeds and invasive species, or pest control.

The Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee held a public hearing on the Bill January 15, 2015.  The Committee will hold another public hearing on the Bill on February 12, at 7:30 pm.  If you would like to testify at the hearing, please register with Jackie Hawksford at 240-777-7803.

I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

Sincerely,

George Leventhal
President, Montgomery County Council

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