Good Morning, Workgroup members and stakeholders. I am Megan Dunn, speaking today on behalf of the Washington State PTA, the state’s oldest and largest child advocacy organization in the state with more than 133,000 members. I am a parent, and a volunteer. My children are in middle school in the Everett School District in Snohomish County. I also work directly with farmers and growers to encourage ecologically sound alternatives to pesticides.

The Washington State PTA respectfully submits the following comments regarding the good neighbor practice of notifying adjacent properties when chemical pesticides are intended to be used and reporting pesticide use. We applaud the State of Washington’s recognition of the extent to which pesticides in agriculture impact our economic and public health. Pesticides are proven or suspected to exert neurological, psychiatric, developmental, hormonal, reproductive, and/or carcinogenic effects. Environmental stewardship and protecting our working families, along with socially just worker protection regulation and economic viability is a basic element of agricultural sustainability and protecting community health.

In 2016, our membership approved the PTA Resolution: Mitigating Environmental Hazards and Contaminants in Schools. This acknowledged that all students and employees would benefit from a healthier school environment with reduced chemical exposure. Safer school chemical policies provide incentive, a clear framework and long-term change.

Pediatricians and health agencies have called for safer chemical policies in and around schools. In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a strong statement that children should not be exposed to any pesticides and recommended IPM as a solution to reduce risk. Similarly, the Washington State Department of Health has reinforced these findings and concluded that pesticide exposure reduces school student performance.

During the 2017 legislative session, Washington passed a law allowing schools to be sited outside the Urban Growth Boundary. As a result, schools will be at an increased risk from agricultural drift as they become constructed in more rural areas.

We know that even when following the label and best practices, pesticides drift onto the environment, onto adjacent properties and also schools. The 2002 Washington Aerial Drift study found “spray drift occurring despite adherence to general precautionary pesticide application guidelines.” This research analyzed a routinely scheduled aerial organophosphorus pesticide application in central Washington and tested the crops and surrounding rural agricultural community.

As there is no requirement for prior notification of intent to spray and without notification, children may be at risk. One example of the need for notification is the exposure to schools and day cares in rural areas. Pesticide exposure in schools occurs from two routes: the intentional use of pesticides inside buildings and on the school campus for pest management and drift from agricultural and forestry applications. Based on a nationwide study of acute illnesses
associated with pesticide exposure at schools, among 406 cases with detailed information on the source of pesticide exposure, 281 (69%) were associated with pesticides used at schools and 125 (31%) were associated with pesticide drift exposure from farmland. By passing this notification change, you could potentially prevent drift exposure in 1/3 of the cases as notification would allow for schools to prepare and protect students, by keeping students indoors and closing windows or ventilation systems. In addition, there are documented cases of schools calling 911 to report chemical odor from pesticides and emergency calls could be avoided.

California farmers have been required to report pesticide use and the data has helped scientist understand the connections between pesticide exposure and health, including developmental delays in children. One example is the CHARGE study on developmental delays and pesticides (the closer you live to agriculture, the higher the likelihood of developmental delays). This important research quantified the increase in Neurodevelopmental Disorders (including autism spectrum disorder) as mothers reside closer to agricultural areas. One study found the proximity to organophosphates at some point during gestation was associated with a 60% increased risk for Autism (ASD), higher for third-trimester exposures. My own family struggles with neurological and behavioral disorders—every school day brings it’s own challenges and it very difficult as a parent to see your child struggle.

Prevention from harm should be the highest priority. We look forward to continuing to work along with concerned stakeholders, as we share the common goal of protecting children’s health and safeguarding our schools, farmworkers and neighbors. Protections for community and environmental health are needed to and strengthen the health of our schools, our agricultural workforce and the economy they sustain.

Washington State PTA’s vision is to make every child’s potential a reality. We encourage you to raise awareness to reduce and mitigate environmental hazards and protect all our families.

Thank you.

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i Kroger, 2005 and Kerry & Kroger, 2012
ii American Acemed of Pediatrics, 2012
vii https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/122-a280/
viii https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/1307044/