

Urge Sen. George to hold hearing on Safe Products Act

Kalamazoo Gazette

January 26, 2010

Due to the hyper-politicized nature of nearly everything in Michigan these days, there are certain pieces of quality legislation that should be easy for lawmakers on opposite sides of the aisle to agree upon but somehow never end up making it to the Governor's desk.

The Children's Safe Products Act is a good example. This legislation would require large toy importers and manufacturers to disclose whether products they sell in Michigan contain "chemicals of highest concern." Examples of such chemicals are mercury, arsenic, cadmium, brominated flame retardants, Bisphenol-A (BPA), and others.

The legislation would not ban those chemicals in Michigan, nor would it prohibit companies from using the chemicals in their products. Instead, it would make the use of such chemicals in children's products public information. It would give parents the right to know what is in the products they might purchase for their kids.

Similar to a list of ingredients on any food product available for retail purchase, this bill would allow consumers to make their own decisions about toys they purchase. By disclosing the "ingredients" of children's products, parents would be empowered to decide for themselves. Rather than forcing regulations on retailers and manufacturers, this legislation would require that all of the information be made public (in the form of a Web site managed by the Michigan Department of Community Health). Then it would be up to the consumer to buy, or not to buy.

Many of the chemicals listed have been found in children's products and linked to reproductive and hormonal problems, developmental and learning disabilities, and cancer. Exposure to toxic chemicals is inevitable in the modern world, but situations exist in which that risk can be significantly reduced. This is a perfect example of an exposure risk that can be minimized if parents choose to do so, but they need to have sufficient information to make such a decision.

This bill, if it became law, would likely require one full time employee to coordinate and disseminate the disclosed product information through a Michigan Department of Community Health Web site. However, it would save countless dollars in the long run by helping parents to protect our most vulnerable population: children. That truly is preventative medicine.

This bill passed the Michigan House of Representatives by a nearly 2-1 margin last May with bipartisan support. Sen. Tom George, chairman of the Health Policy Committee in the Senate, has the ability to call a hearing on this bill, move it to the full Senate for a vote, and, by doing so, help parents protect their children from risk of exposure to toxic chemicals.

From one physician to another, I respectfully urge Sen. George to give this bill its day in the Health Policy Committee and report it out. Let the votes fall where they may, but at least consider giving parents what they deserve, the right to know.

Dr. Joe Schwarz / Battle Creek, member, Michigan LCV Board of Directors