

Testimony of Pamela Miller, Executive Director and Biologist with Alaska Community Action on Toxics  
For the Senate Health and Social Services Committee  
In support of SB 151—an Act relating to chemicals of high concern for children  
February 19, 2014

I would like to begin by thanking Chair Stedman, Vice Chair Senator Micciche, and Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony on SB 151. My name is Pamela Miller, Biologist and Executive Director with Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT). ACAT is a statewide environmental health organization of scientists, public health professionals, and community advocates that conducts research and provides educational programs, technical assistance, and training. We strongly support SB 151 because it is an important measure to protect public health and especially the health of our most vulnerable, babies, infants, and children, as well as firefighters who are on the front lines of exposure to these dangerous chemicals.

This year, at least 33 states are stepping up to protect public health in considering policies addressing the untested and toxic chemicals in everyday products. Toys, clothes, bedding, baby shampoo—all can contain chemicals toxic to the brain and body. We've known for years that the federal law meant to protect us (the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act) is outdated, allowing untested chemicals and known carcinogens, hormone disruptors, heavy metals and other toxics into the products we use every day. Although Congress has failed to fix the law, states have established over 200 policies in the last ten years to protect people from hazardous chemicals in consumer products.

We are grateful to Senator Olson for introducing SB 151 and strongly support it because it gives the state of Alaska the opportunity to better protect the health of children by establishing a list of chemicals of high concern for children—this provides parents, health care professionals, and policy makers important information to make enlightened decisions about chemicals and products that may cause harm. The latest science shows that exposure to industrial chemicals that are used in everyday products is silently eroding intelligence, disrupting learning and behavior, truncating future achievements, and damaging our society and future generations. Certain developmental neurotoxic chemicals can cause permanent brain injury when young children are exposed—these include some well-known ones such as lead, mercury, certain pesticides, PCBs, and the flame retardant chemicals PBDEs.

The evidence is clear and compelling that the chlorinated tris chemicals now used as replacement flame retardant chemicals in children's furniture, nap mats, nursing pads, crib mattresses, and play tunnels are carcinogenic and mutagenic. Laboratory studies provide compelling evidence that TDCPP is neurotoxic, an endocrine disruptor, and a reproductive toxicant. The developing brain is exceptionally sensitive to injury caused by toxic chemicals. Learning deficits associated with exposures to these types of chemicals can persist throughout childhood and may have lifelong adverse effects. The chemicals leach out of the products and children are exposed through their normal hand-to-mouth activities and ingestion of contaminated dust from their close contact with floors, food, and toys.

Studies also show that the addition of toxic flame retardant chemicals to furniture foam and products does not provide proven fire safety benefits although they make the products more hazardous while in use and more toxic if they do catch fire (due to the release of highly toxic dioxins and furans). Fortunately, many safe alternative technologies and methods make it unnecessary to add toxic flame retardant chemicals in order to achieve fire safety. Responsible manufacturers are using barrier technologies and naturally fire retardant materials to provide the necessary safety without the use of harmful chemicals.

We respectfully urge you to pass crucial public health measure—you are hearing from health care providers, firefighters, Native leaders, and parents that SB 151 is important for the protection of our children, families, and future generations. Thank you for considering my testimony today.