

## IN SUPPORT OF H.783, S.558

### Testimony in Support of “An Act for a Healthy Massachusetts, Safer Alternatives to Toxic Chemicals”

June 11, 2007

By Lynn Wolbarst, Environment and Natural Resources Specialist

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly supports H.783 and S.558. This legislation conforms to the LWVM principals of maximum protection of public health and the environment. The background material on these ten chemicals leaves no question that they harm human health and the environment and should not be in use if safer alternatives are available.

League members are known to be knowledgeable and well informed on issues, and yet, many of the details of the chemicals in this bill came as a surprise to them.

- One local LWV member was shocked that lead, a chemical banned in paint and gasoline for years because of its well known neurotoxic effects, is still used in new products.
- Another member had no idea that the flame retardant PBDE is impregnated in plastics used in computer and electronic casings and that the health effects are significant. They were also unaware that PBDE's migrate out of the plastic and into house dust and eventually into our tissues.
- Many members I talked to were also surprised that no regulations were preventing the use of these chemicals in consumer goods, that the current toxics regulations left a gap allowing these products to be sold ,used, incinerated and landfilled undetected and unregulated.

However, there were two of the ten chemicals in this bill whose health effects many LWV members were not shocked to hear about: organophosphate pesticides and 2,4-D herbicides. Because most League members have lawns, these chemicals are familiar tools in their upkeep. LWV members are well informed regarding these chemicals. partly because their harmful effects have been public since Rachel Carson wrote Silent Spring in 1962 and since Vietnam Veterans brought to light the human health effects of Agent Orange (2,4-D ) in the 1970's. Organic lawn care is the “safer alternative” to chemical use and many LWV members adopted this method on their own lawns, as well as urging their local governments to change to safer methods on town land. Andover, Newton, Needham, Wellesley, Marblehead, and Gloucester/Cape Ann are a few Leagues whose members have been active for almost a decade promoting awareness and use of integrated pest management and organic lawn care at the local level. Replacing chemicals that have been linked with cancer, endocrine disruption, and neurological problems with organic lawn care is not a difficult decision once you know the "health roulette" involved in using pesticides and herbicides.

Awareness of the harmful effects of all the chemicals in this bill, coupled with the availability of safer alternatives, changes the question from “Why should we change to safer alternatives?” to “How do we change?” The Safer Alternatives Bill answers this question in a positive way:

- It provides a regulatory road map to transition from the use of these chemicals;

- It provides help for businesses through grants, technical assistance, and worker training;
- It is designed to stimulate the Massachusetts green technology sector through research and development of safer alternatives.

This is a creative and feasible approach to a critical problem which affects everyone's health. The LWVM strongly urges the Committee to give a favorable report to H.783 and S.558.

Thank you for your time and consideration.