

1116 Phillips Street  
Missoula, MT 59802  
February 13, 2005

SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY

EXHIBIT NO. 5

DATE: 2-14-05

BILL NO. SJ 15

RE: SJ-15

Dear Members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee:

I am the mother of a 19-month-old boy, Zachary. I have been breastfeeding Zack since he was born, and plan to continue for several more months. When Zack was about a month old, I took part in a study conducted by Northwest Environment Watch. The study measured the levels of dangerous toxins such as PBDEs, PCBs, dioxins, and furans in breast milk. I was startled to learn that, despite what I consider to be my healthy lifestyle, my breast milk—and likely the rest of my body—carries a substantial load of toxins.

This didn't seem right, I reasoned. I get plenty of exercise. I drink filtered water. I don't use tobacco. I buy mostly organic food, and prepare my meals from scratch. How could my breast milk be anything but pristine? The answer, I believe, lies in the ubiquity of the above named toxins. For instance, take PBDEs, a class of brominated fire retardants. In the modern era, it is all but impossible to avoid exposure to PBDEs—unless one avoids use of cars, furniture, computers, and other appliances. Moreover, one must give up eating, since PBDEs are found in many food sources, particularly those high in animal fats. Ostensibly, even organic meats and dairy products contain PBDEs.

But why should we be concerned about PBDEs? PBDE exposure has been linked to nervous system damage, learning and memory impairment, behavioral changes, fetal malformations, and thyroid hormone imbalance. Although my son, thankfully, has exhibited none of the these symptoms, I am alarmed to learn that human PBDE levels in North America are doubling every two to five years. My son is safe. But what about babies born 10 or 15 years from now?

We may find encouragement by looking to Europe, where Penta and Octa PBDEs have been banned. Since this ban, human PBDE levels have been declining. On the whole, human PBDE levels in Europe are far lower than the levels measured in the study I took part in. The Northwest Environment Watch study participants, all residents of Helena and Missoula, showed PBDE levels 20 to 40 times those of Europeans. By discontinuing use of Penta and Octa PBDEs, we can bring human PBDE levels in America down to the safer European levels... and possibly even lower.

SJ-15 will help Montanans reduce their exposure to PBDEs, thereby creating a safer, healthier future for our children. I would like to echo SJ-15's support for a) phase-out of PBDEs in Montana, b) continued monitoring of PBDE levels in the people and environment of Montana, and c) further development of safe alternatives to PBDEs. Most of all, I applaud SJ-15's promotion of breastfeeding as the healthiest choice for Montana mothers and babies. It is my hope that, with work toward reducing our exposure to environmental toxins, breast milk will always be "the perfect food."

Thanks for your time and attention,



Rebekah Jensen Griffin