

# ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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## **Written Testimony in Support of HB 3162 From Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns Submitted to the House Committee on Health Care, March 20, 2013**

Chair Greenlick and members of the House Committee on Health Care, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide organization that brings together diverse communities of faith to learn, serve and advocate for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.. EMO has 16 member denominations and 140 member organizations, congregations and interfaith partners. EMO's Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns' mission is to connect, inform, inspire and empower people, congregations and religious institutions to work for justice and the care and renewal of earth. It includes over 1200 individuals and 550 congregations.

For many years we educated the faith community on the dangers of toxics to human health and the environment and advocated for policies that address toxic contamination at the national, state and local level. In 2012, we piloted an EPA funded project with Josiah Hill Clinic in NE Portland to develop a model for congregations serving low income communities to reduce environmental health risks in the home. This included teaching congregants how to identify toxics and asthma triggers in common household products and non-toxic alternatives. Of special concern in this project were infants and children, who are especially vulnerable. Unfortunately, there is no way for parents to know at the point of purchase if many products are harmful to a child's health.

An important first step is to know what carcinogens, endocrine disruptors and other harmful chemicals are in the products our children are exposed to. HB 3162 represents this vital next step for Oregon. As soon as possible, we need to replace these chemicals with safer alternatives. This action will reducing health care costs, now and in the future. It could also create new economic opportunity for Oregon in the development of bio-based products. Disclosure allows consumers the opportunity to purchase in line with their values and to support the emergence of the green chemistry industry in Oregon and beyond. Oregon agriculture may be able to contribute significantly to some of the alternatives developed. EMO and INEC strongly support HB 3162 for these and other reasons.

Faith community support is strong for better chemical policy. In 2011 and 12, 164 Oregon faith leaders signed on to the "Interfaith Statement for Chemical Policy Reform" and 175 signed the "Grandparents Faith Letter on Toxics and Future Generations." The first letter, citing four core religious values, includes the following policy recommendations especially pertinent to HB 3162: 1) Hold companies accountable for demonstrating that chemicals are safe; 2) Invest in research to understand and protect children's health from chemical harm and 3) Provide chemical and health safety information to workers and the public. The Grandparents letter expresses deep concern about the rising rates of diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's type II diabetes and heart disease that have links to toxic chemical exposure early in life. The letter asks members of Congress to "consider the health of all people today, future generations and the sacredness of all life on earth" by passing policies that ensure "1) chemicals are safe before they end up in the products we all use and ultimately migrate into our bodies and the environment, 2)swiftly remove the most dangerous chemicals when safer alternative exist, and 3) reduce the disproportionate burden of burden of toxic chemicals born by low-income communities and communities of color, and in particular by all of God's children."

A 2010 statement with Oregon signers, "Christian Principles for a Healthy Body and Spirit," calls for the requirement that "companies and government regulatory agencies to inform people about chemicals that are in consumer products through "right to know" and a published chemical database so that individuals and state regulatory agencies can make sound decisions for their families, their congregations and their communities."

One of the most important legacies that you will leave in support of children's health this session is the passage of a strong toxics disclosure bill. We strongly support the passage of HB 3162 and thank the distinguished members of the committee for your consideration.

Jenny Holmes, EMO Environmental Ministries Director  
Leslie Pohl Kosbau, Co-Chair, INEC Steering Committee  
The Rev. John Boonstra, Co-Chair, INEC Steering Committee