

In Support of HB 2619-A Engrossed
5/7/2019

Dear Chair Holvey and members of the House Rules Committee,

My name is Yolanda Gomez. I am a first generation Mexican-American. I am the parent of three children. I am also the child of a victim of agricultural pesticide exposure.

Throughout the 1970's and early 1980's my father worked as a foreman in fields and orchards and vineyards in the United States. He and others were not only exposed to pesticides but they were given irrigation water to drink throughout the day.

Of the pesticides he was exposed to one of the most damaging was chlorpyrifos.

I was not yet born when my father began to show signs and symptoms that would later come to be associated with prolonged pesticide exposure. He was in his early twenties and his ongoing fatigue and weight loss were alarming. As were his nausea, vomiting, and a rash. Seeking medical care was not an option. My parents did not have medical insurance. As I grew in my mother's womb he grew more and more ill.

Eventually, he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The mediterranean strain. This is coded language used to describe the specific type of cancer that migrant farm workers get.

He wouldn't know then that this diagnosis thirty years in the future would signify decades of studies concluding the relationship between pesticide exposure related to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in agricultural workers. He wouldn't know that he, like many others who worked alongside him, were at risk all those years to becoming ill and dying from cancer.

My father would eventually succumb to his illness when I was less than two years old. He died in pain. He died slowly. He was a young man. He was 24.

My father was viewed as little more than the dirt on the ground within the fields and orchards that he worked: planting, pruning, weeding, harvesting. With his death he became a statistic.

I'm here today, to speak on his behalf, full of outrage and sorrow about the life that I had to live without knowing my father.

His name was Dionicio Gomez.

I want to know what would you say to his grandchildren who only know the ghost of their grandfather? And to my mother who was left alone at 18 to raise a child? And to his mother? And those who worked beside him in the fields and orchards?

The emotional and economic damage will last generations.

My father would become a part of larger community of those who've lost their lives for the olive oil you use on your pasta, for the tomatoes in your salad, for the cheap labor that gives you your fresh produce, your flowers, and allows you to keep the dirt off of *your* hands.

My father is one in thousands who have been harmed due to these poisonous practices.

This ban, although it cannot bring my father back, it will set a precedent, one that states firmly, that we will not let another person suffer in the way that Dionicio did. It's one small step toward the future of ethical agricultural practices; practices that value human lives.

Now I understand that many will object to my usage of highly emotive language that draws parallels between salads and cancer but, between the lines, between the rows of crops and orchards. People are literally dying . As absurd as that sounds this is not fiction.

This is reality. And we can do something about it, together.

Please take action now to pass HB 2619 A-Engrossed and permanently ban chlorpyrifos.

This should have happened long ago.

Signed,

Yolanda Gomez

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“Though we tremble before uncertain futures

may we meet illness, death and adversity with strength
may we dance in the face of our fears.”

– **Gloria Anzaldúa**