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ASSEMBLY SPEAKER
HON. ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS
SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

NYS ASSEMBLY PUERTO RICAN/HISPANIC TASK FORCE



HON. KARINES REYES R.N.
CHAIRWOMAN

December 14, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor
Executive Chamber
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

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RE: Letter of Support - Birds and Bees Protection Act (S.1856A/A.7640)

Dear Governor Hochul,

I am writing to you today, as an Assemblymember, the Chair of the NYS Assembly & Senate Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, and also as a nurse to express my support for the Birds and Bees Protection Act – a commonsense bill that will protect the health of New Yorkers by eliminating unnecessary uses of neurotoxic neonicotinoid or “neonic” pesticides. I encourage you to sign S.1856-A/A.7640 into law.

While neonics’ devastating impacts on pollinator populations is concerning, growing evidence regarding neonics’ threat to the health of New Yorkers – particularly to that of our children – concerns me deeply as a health professional. Neonics are neurotoxic agents, and merit special concern given widespread and disproportionate exposures in New Yorkers—especially in the Hispanic communities.

A recent study of 171 pregnant women across New York and four other states found neonics in the bodies of *more than 95%* of participants – with the highest levels in Hispanic women. Worryingly, levels *steadily increased* over the 4-year study (2017-2020) and were significantly higher than those observed by CDC monitoring just two years earlier (2015-2016).

As with lead and mercury, neurotoxins pose the greatest threats to our children. That’s why research finding neonics pass efficiently from the mother to the developing fetus is concerning. Equally troubling is the research highlighted in a recent letter from state health experts regarding neonics’ impacts on both exposed children and adults:

- Birth defects of the heart and brain - Studies from predominantly Hispanic agricultural areas of California’s San Joaquin Valley reported a link between neonics increased risk of babies born with Tetralogy of Fallot, a rare heart defect, and anencephaly, a serious brain defect.
- Autism-like symptoms - An NIH-funded study reported that frequent neonic exposures during pregnancy were associated with a two-fold elevated risk of autism spectrum disorder in prenatally exposed children.
- Acute poisoning - From 2018-2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) received more than 840 reports of people poisoned with neonicotinoids, with reported symptoms including muscle tremors, difficulty breathing, memory loss, and more—all hallmark signs of poisoning with a neurotoxic chemical.
- Reduced Sperm Counts and Testosterone Levels - Studies also link neonic exposure in adults to decreased testosterone levels and significant reductions in sperm count and motility.

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*Full list can be found
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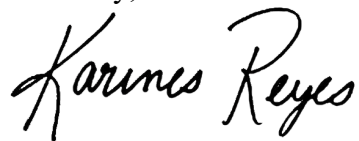
Oscar Castillo, Executive Director

Adding to my concern is the fact that neonic exposures are most likely for vulnerable communities, who are least able to avoid them. Neonics contaminate food and extensively pollute water in New York state, but conventional chlorination treatment fails to remove neonics from drinking water without advanced filtration. That makes neonic contamination a special concern for constituents in my district who drink New York City's famously purchasing all organic food and filtering water at the tap can greatly reduce exposure, those are not available or affordable options for many working New York families. A December 2022 Harvard study also highlights how pollinator losses already translate to lower food production, hitting populations that already face disproportionate impacts from limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables the hardest.

The Birds and Bees Protection Act effectively addresses New York's neonic pollution problem with strategic and science-based policy. The bill mirrors key findings of the 2020 Cornell Report - an analysis of over 1,100 peer-reviewed studies - prohibiting only those uses that pose the greatest threats to New York's environment, but are economically unbeneficial or easily replaceable with safer alternatives, specifically: treated corn, wheat, and soy seeds, as well as the use of neonics in turf and ornamental spaces. The bill also allows several years for the phase-in of the key provisions, giving seed suppliers, farmers and others the needed time to allow the market to shift, and provides controlled exceptions should the market fail to do so. Additionally, the bill exempts neonic treatments against invasive species, recognizing the emerging threats of hemlock woolly adelgid and emerald ash borer.

New York can be a national leader in science-based neonic regulation by eliminating unjustified high-cost, low-benefit neonic uses. The reasonable approach of the Birds and Bees Protection Act would benefit pollinators, our state's farmers who depend on them, New York's ecosystems, and all New Yorkers who value clean soil, clean water, and their own health. I strongly urge you to sign The Birds and Bees Protection Act (S.1856-A/A.7640) into law today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karines Reyes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karines Reyes, R.N.
Member of Assembly – District 87
Chair, New York State Puerto Rican / Hispanic Task Force