

4/21/25

Minnesota Senate

Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband and Rural Development Committee

Chair Putnam and Committee Members,

We, Dr. Baumler and Dr. Brandenburger, support SF188/HF44 the Test and Report Phthalates in Packaged Food bill.

Food unifies all of us in the community in that we all need to eat to stay alive. While we each have personal preferences and varying cultural values related to food, if we don't eat, we won't survive. Food is a source of nourishment and also of comfort and connection; we all have that in common.

The development of systems so that people have the food they need is constantly evolving. The complexity of food systems has increased with the population growth and global connections. For the prior half century, the use of plastics has in part allowed for the production of household and individual sized servings of foods that meet our needs and fit with our lifestyles. The use of plastics also brings challenges, however the phthalates that are a component of plastic are now known to pose health threats.

Over the last several decades there have been two major changes in the way people eat that have increased exposure to phthalates: the amount of processed foods that are consumed has increased, and the amount of money spent on food away from home has increased. There are more processed food products on the grocery shelves than ever before, and there are more options to eat outside the home. A study done by the USDA Economic Research Service found that in 2023, 58.5% of total food spending was on food away from home. A new analysis led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that more than half of calories consumed at home by adults in the U.S. come from ultra-processed, packaged foods. These two major changes have led to the increased exposure to phthalates for families, making this topic highly relevant today.

The increased exposure to phthalates does not affect all families equally. A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that adults who were more food insecure were more likely to rely on ultra-processed foods. The cost of whole, unpackaged foods such as fruits and vegetables can be a barrier for low-income households, leading them to rely more on less expensive, more enticing packaged food. Ultra-processed foods are more likely to contain phthalates.

While individuals and families that are socioeconomically disadvantaged may have increased exposure to phthalates, the issue impacts everyone who eats. The data from Consumer Reports indicates that it isn't just packaged foods that contain phthalates. Phthalates appear in meats through conveyor belts, and also in vegetables through the soil. Phthalates are in foods that are

certified organic. Thus, phthalate exposure is a concern for even those who don't rely much on ultra-processed foods. It's a concern for people who eat, which is all of us.

Published research has demonstrated the associations between phthalate exposure and fetal health, mental health, endocrine function. Below is from a review recently published in the scientific journal Toxicology in Vitro:

Recent literature has highlighted significant findings regarding their [phthalates] oncogenicity and toxicity. Perhaps the most alarming discovery has been the impact of phthalates on the developing fetus, affecting human lives well before they are born. The deleterious effects of phthalates have been found to range from causing abnormal fetal development and preterm birth to interfering with normal reproductive and neurological development, extending well into the postnatal period. Various studies have been published using animal models to demonstrate that phthalates are associated with lower survival rates among embryos, as well as higher rates of limb deformities. Thus, this correspondence reviews the teratogenic range of phthalates and highlights important areas of future research, aiming to bring light to the silent yet significant repercussions of these chemicals on our future generations.

In addition, several studies have demonstrated associations between phthalate exposure and risk of depression, and emotional and behavioral disorders.

Prior to 1970, food labels weren't required on packaged food. Could you imagine purchasing food without any indication of what is in it? This same concept applies to the content of phthalates in foods. Consumers have a right to transparency so that they can make informed choices, especially in light of contaminants that may cause harm.

As registered dietitians with doctorates in nutrition science, as parents, and as consumer advocates, we ask for your support for senate file 188.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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