

April 21, 2025

Minnesota Senate

Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband and Rural Development Committee

Dear Chair Putnam and Committee Members,

I am writing in **support** of SF188. This bill will require food companies to test their products for phthalates and make the results public.

Phthalates are chemicals added to plastics to make them more flexible and durable, but these additives are not bound to plastic and can migrate. When our food comes in contact with plastic packaging or processing equipment like plastic containers, conveyor belts, gloves or tubing, phthalates can leach into our food and drinks. Phthalates are often called “everywhere chemicals” because they are used in hundreds of products, including toys, shampoo, perfume, vinyl flooring, shower curtains, and PVC. However, food is the most common route of exposure for most people.

A 2024 Consumer Reports (CR) study tested grocery store items and found phthalates in 84 of the 85 items tested, some at concerning levels. Another 2024 study looked at olive oil and found phthalates in 100% of the products tested. Studies from 2013 found similar results. Phthalate use in food contact materials has not been phased out; phthalates are widespread in our food system.

This is a concern because phthalates are known to interfere with the body’s endocrine system and can have an impact at low doses. Fetuses and children are most at risk because they are going through rapid development. Endocrine disrupting chemicals can harm those exposed and, in the case of a developing fetus, also their descendants.

Phthalates are associated with serious health risks, including obesity, diabetes, infertility, asthma, liver disease, kidney issues, and certain cancers. They are also linked to low sperm count, cardiovascular disease, pre-term babies, and are a reproductive toxicant, especially impacting the male reproductive system.

The Minnesota Department of Health included 17 phthalates on its Chemicals of High Concern List and 3 phthalates on its Priority Chemicals List, due to high production volumes. In 2019, the EPA included 6 phthalates in the TSCA list of 20 high-priority chemicals that should undergo risk evaluation. In 2022, the FDA banned 23 phthalates, at the request of the food industry because they are no longer in use, however the FDA continues to allow 8 phthalates to be used in food contact material, including DEHP. Phthalates have been restricted in children’s products and toys. The states of Maine and Vermont have banned phthalates in food packaging.

Our regulatory agencies, at the state and national level, continue to have concerns about the risks posed by phthalate exposure. Phthalates are not allowed as a food additive but there are currently no restrictions or safe levels established for their use in food contact material. The EPA and FDA are reviewing the risks posed by phthalates; however, the regulatory process moves at a glacial pace. This bill will not ban phthalates but is an important first step to increase the transparency of phthalate contamination in our food system for the benefit of food manufacturers and consumers and it could provide valuable information for regulators.

Healthy Kids Minnesota is a biomonitoring program that measures urine levels of more than 70 chemicals, including phthalates. The 2022 results showed that 100% of participants had at least one phthalate in their urine. The program provides results to families along with advice on reducing exposure. They currently have no information to share regarding which processed foods to avoid. This bill would provide an additional tool for families to use to reduce their exposure from food.

Food manufacturers frequently test their products to ensure they meet promised nutrition and safety requirements. Food testing labs have indicated that they have the capacity to handle the additional testing this bill would require. The addition of a phthalate test would provide important information for companies so that they could take steps to eliminate phthalates if they are detected. Also, this information can help companies reduce the risk of introducing phthalates when making decisions such as equipment upgrades and packaging redesign.

Consumers have the right to know what is in the food they eat and serve their families. Currently there is no way for them to know what phthalates levels are in the food they buy. Even choosing organic food does not eliminate the risk. In CR's study, the product with the highest level of phthalates was Annie's Organic Cheesy Ravioli. Another family favorite, Cheerios also had concerning levels. This bill will ensure consumers have the information they need to make safer choices for their families.

This bill is important to protect the reputation and confidence in our food supply system. Food manufacturers are proud of the food they produce and work hard to ensure their products are safe and healthy to eat. Most are likely not aware that phthalate could be leaching into their products. This is an opportunity for them to discover if phthalates are in their products so they can take steps to eliminate them. This bill also provides a means for consumers to make healthy food choices and reduce their exposure to phthalates.

Sincerely,

Lori Olinger
Coalition for Plastic Reduction