



of the Anacostia River

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## Testimony on Bill 52-14, Non-Essential Pesticides Montgomery County Council - January 15, 2015

My name is James Graham. I am president of Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, a volunteer watershed group dedicated to the ecological restoration of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River. I am speaking on behalf of the group.

**We strongly support elimination of non-essential pesticides.** The harm pesticides cause to pollinators, aquatic life, and humans is well documented. The case against neonicotinoids particularly resonates with us, as allowable concentrations can reduce invertebrate species, which we monitor, by 50% according to a 2013 study.<sup>1</sup> These soluble, systemic neurotoxins accumulate in the soil and leach into water.<sup>2</sup> We commend Councilmembers Leventhal and Elrich for this effort on behalf of human and environmental health.

While we support this bill, we believe it needs some adjustments.

1) **At least the rough of golf courses should be covered.** Exempting golf courses pokes a large hole in the hoped for improvements to water quality. We are particularly sensitive to this because four courses drain into the Northwest Branch. We have found water quality worse in the large Bel Pre tributary which drains the Leisure World and Argyle courses, than in the mainstem, possibly due to the golf courses.

2) **Athletic fields.** We have been firmly opposed to replacing natural grass with plastic blades and used tire crumb infill.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, much of the damage resulting from pesticides is similar to that from long exposure to tire crumb: various cancers and endocrine and neurological disorders. Now that synthetic fields have been in use for a decade, players, especially goalies, who breathe a lot of tire dust, are developing cancer. Some turf grass managers think quality grass athletic fields are not possible without grub and pre-emergent weed killers, so a ban on pesticides might lead to yet more artificial turf, despite its health and environmental problems.

**Do not exempt athletic fields.** Pesticide harm is very real. The ultimate goal should be well constructed, organically managed grass fields. However, some form of compromise giving turf managers room to learn organic techniques and build healthy soil is appropriate: For example: Control grubs

on fields with Milky Spore, an organic approach. Require Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which calls for the least toxic, effective treatment. Train field managers in organic field maintenance and begin now to build healthy soil. After several years, allow no more pesticides except in critical cases. **We regret that public school fields are not currently covered by this bill, but they are supposed to already be using IPM. We hope that state legislation will ultimately bring the schools under this law as it has MNCPPC.**

3) Finally, **remove the sunset date for this law.** Why make anyone think that in a few years they can again poison a lawn? These restrictions are minimal. Follow the lead of several Canadian provinces: drastically reduce the toxins we put into our land, water, and bodies. We can do this. As Councilmember Leventhal recognizes, a green lawn does not need to be a menace to birds, bees, aquatic life, and children.

Thank you.

