

**Testimony of Charlotte Brody
BlueGreen Alliance
before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and
Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health
Joint Legislative Hearing on the Safe Chemicals Act
November 17, 2011
Washington, DC**

Chairman Boxer, Chairman Lautenberg, Ranking Members Inhofe and Crapo and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning. I am Charlotte Brody, a registered nurse and the Director of Chemicals, Public Health and Green Chemistry for the BlueGreen Alliance.

The BlueGreen Alliance is a unique partnership of 11 labor unions and four environmental organizations. We bring together 15 million Americans in pursuit of good jobs, a clean environment and a green economy. We support the passage of the Safe Chemicals Act because it can create some of the middle class manufacturing jobs that our country desperately needs. Between 1992 and 2010 more than 300,000 chemical manufacturing jobs disappeared in the United States. Employment fell 38 percent in the chemical industry, at a time when all manufacturing jobs declined by 24 percent.

I know I look more like the old nurse that I am than the typical image of a Steelworker. But I am a proud-dues paying member of Local 2002-22 of the Steelworkers and a Safety and Health Advisor to the Steelworkers' Health, Safety and Environment Department. Among the union partners of the BlueGreen Alliance, the Steelworkers represent the majority of organized workers in the chemical industry, as well as hundreds of thousands of workers who use chemicals on the job. Two of the BlueGreen Alliance's other union partners, the United Food and Commercial Workers and the IUE-CWA also include some chemical workers in their ranks. These unions and their members depend upon the existence of an American chemical industry. We need more Americans making chemicals and more Americans using chemicals made in America. But we won't be able

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achieve that vision if we're just producing and using the same chemicals that were in production 40 years ago. We support the Safe Chemicals Act because we believe it will spur innovation and the invention of a new generation of safer chemicals that can be produced in the United States.


I started practicing as a registered nurse around the time that TSCA became law. If I practiced nursing the same way I did then, I would be in prison for gross negligence and malpractice. The science about disease and treatment has changed so much since then.

What have we learned about human disease and chemicals? It's hard to cram 40 years of science into 5 minutes of testimony. So let me just use the example of Agent Orange. Decades ago I worked with young soldiers just back from Viet Nam. Those who had been exposed to Agent Orange were informed that the skin rash, chloracne, was the only problem they would have from their exposure.

That's what the science told us then. But over the last 40 years new knowledge keeps showing us how wrong we were. Every few years the Institute of Medicine looks at the new science and learns more about how this one chemical can cause multiple kinds of harm, even to people who had no acute effects. Now Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange can be compensated for one kind of leukemia, two kinds of lymphoma (Hodgkin's Disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma) and four other kinds of cancer as well as diabetes, a type of heart disease and Parkinson's Disease. The VA also recognizes as compensable spina bifida, a defect in the developing fetus that results in incomplete closing of the spine in the children of Vietnam veterans. One chemical. So many diseases, including in children born decades later. So many years after exposure. Four decades ago we simply didn't understand that chemicals could do that.

Allowing our nation's chemicals management system to remain lost in the 1970s is its own form of negligence, especially when we have the opportunity to modernize the law. The punishment for this negligence is cancer, birth defects, infertility, asthma and nervous system disorders. But the sentence is being doled out indiscriminately to workers, babies *in utero*, the people who live at the fence line of chemical plants and millions of other chronically ill Americans, including people each of you were sent here to represent.

The Safe Chemicals Act would modernize TSCA to reflect what we've learned about chemicals and human health since the 1970s. The bill's safety standard of reasonable certainty of no harm from aggregate exposure captures the way good science works and underscores the legislation's intent – to make chemicals safe. Especially important for the members of the BlueGreen Alliance is that workers are identified as part of the vulnerable populations protected under that standard. The prioritization system and

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tiered use of data do a good job of tackling the huge problem created by decades of unregulated chemicals and starting to solve that problem with a worst first approach. I represented the BlueGreen Alliance in the stakeholder process that Senators Inhofe and Lautenberg co-hosted this year and I commend both of you and your staffs for creating a careful, reasoned and reasonable dialogue.

I was trained as an OB-GYN nurse -- a baby nurse -- and while I've had lots of different jobs with different responsibilities over the years, I still think like a nurse. I know the Senate has become a deeply partisan place and that proposals that would give the EPA more power to protect are not popular in every office. But the Safe Chemicals Act is fundamentally not about politics. It's about mercury in breast milk. It's about phthalates in newborn babies' cord blood. And it's about the creation of a new set of American manufacturing jobs making chemicals that are 21st century safe. Doing nothing is a negligent act. Thank you.