



CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & PROTECTION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Children's Environmental Health and Protection Advisory Council

Tuesday, April 2, 2024
10:00am – 11:30am

MINUTES

Members:

Cliff Mitchell (Chair)
Laura Allen
Alicia Mezu
Camille Burke
Christine Fogle
Kelly Love
Kristen Rawlett
Kylan Simpson (staff)

Guests:

Krisna Becker
Veronika Carella
Michael Ichniowski
Alexander Lehmann

Meeting Notes

Welcome and Introduction

- Cliff Mitchell began the meeting by apologizing for not sending out the agenda earlier due to a hectic legislative session. The council lacked a quorum, so no formal business could be conducted. The meeting's focus was to discuss specific environmental issues in schools.
- Cliff Mitchell introduced the topic of the day: environmental health concerns at Poolesville High School in Montgomery County. Krisna Becker had contacted him and Bobbie James at the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) over a year ago about these concerns. Given that the council's mandate includes children's environmental health, this topic aligned with its focus on school environments.

Presentation by Krisna Becker

- Krisna Becker presented her experiences and concerns regarding the environmental issues at Poolesville High School. She outlined the problems caused by a construction project that began over a year ago, resulting in students experiencing symptoms like breathing problems, stinging eyes, nausea, and headaches. These issues became acute during a period when roof tarring was occurring near the auditorium, with students and people in the town reporting strong fumes.
- Krisna Becker noted that parents expected the school to reschedule hazardous work after initial complaints, but school officials made excuses, citing logistical and financial constraints. The ongoing construction created various environmental hazards, including welding fumes, gym floor finishes, and inadequate safety measures such as poorly sealed doors. She suggested that significant changes are needed to protect students from these environmental health risks.
- Krisna Becker highlighted that a formal complaint process with the state board is one of the few available mechanisms to address safety issues in schools. However, this process is not well-known

among parents and can take a long time to resolve. She expressed concern over the lack of effective legal protections for children's environmental health in Maryland. She also noted that the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) standards are designed for industrial settings and do not apply to children in schools.

Recommendations and Further Discussion

- Krisna Becker recommended mandatory relocation of students during construction projects to ensure their safety and well-being. She cited the 2012 International Green Construction Code, which specifies that schools undergoing construction should be unoccupied with permanent HVAC turned off. She also suggested that the council should recommend a state-level case officer or agency to guide complex cases through the system, serving as a centralized point of contact to avoid confusion and delays in addressing complaints.
- Cliff Mitchell raised the idea of improving health surveillance systems within schools to track complaints, absenteeism, and other indicators of potential environmental health issues. This would lead to better monitoring and earlier detection of problems.
- Camille Burke asked about the structure of authority in Montgomery County compared to Baltimore City. Krisna Becker explained that in Montgomery County, the school system has the primary decision-making authority.
- Laura Allen suggested reaching out to Montgomery County's School Health Services to gather more information on absenteeism and health-related data.
- Christine Fogle from the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services offered to forward concerns to her supervisors and help connect Krisna Becker with relevant officials.

Public Comment

- Veronika Carella suggested that CEHPAC should focus on advocating for state-level legislation to strengthen legal protections for children's environmental health. She recommended reviewing previous legislation and drafting new motions to address issues like pesticide use in schools.
- Michael Ichniowski commended Krisna Becker for her persistence in advocating for the safety of students and noted that state agencies should take responsibility for addressing these issues on a broader scale. He expressed hope that future legislation could offer stronger protections, but also acknowledged that legislative changes might not come in time to protect current students. He suggested that immediate action, such as media attention or student walkouts, might be necessary to draw attention to the issue and prompt a response from the school system.

Closing Remarks

- Cliff Mitchell thanked Krisna Becker for her detailed and articulate presentation, acknowledging the complexity of the issue and the need for further action. The council committed to continuing the discussion and exploring potential actions to address the environmental health concerns in schools.
- The meeting concluded with a motion to adjourn. The council agreed to meet again at a future date to continue discussing these and related issues. Meeting dates and agendas would be shared promptly with council members and other stakeholders.