



To: Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Pignatelli, and members of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture
From: Deirdre Cummings, MASSPIRG Legislative Director and Katherine Kjaer, MASSPIRG Students
November 12, 2019

In Support of HB 763, *An Act to protect Massachusetts pollinators*

My name is Deirdre Cummings and I am the Legislative Director for Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MASSPIRG). MASSPIRG is a member-supported, statewide, non-partisan and non-profit public interest advocacy organization fighting for consumers for 45 years. I am joined by Katherine Kjaer, a junior at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst representing MASSPIRG Students. MASSPIRG Students is also a non-partisan, non-profit, public interest advocacy organization with 13 chapters across the commonwealth on public universities - including community colleges, state universities, and the UMass campuses from the south coast to Boston harbor and to the Berkshires.

We are here today to strongly support of H. 763, *An Act to protect Massachusetts pollinators*, filed by Representative Carolyn Dykema and a bipartisan group of 153 legislative sponsors. The bill is also supported by Attorney General Maura Healey and more than 100 local organizations.

Millions of bees are dying off each year, in the U.S. and around the world.

In the last decade, declining pollinator health, specifically among honeybee and wild bee populations, has been a cause for concern both in Massachusetts and around the country. In 2017, Massachusetts beekeepers reported a 64.9 percent annual loss in colony numbers.

You can imagine that bees play a role in the ecosystem so losing bees matters. But what we also know is that if we lose all our bees, our food supply will be dramatically affected. Bees pollinate much of the food we depend on. Without bees we wouldn't have apples, broccoli, coffee beans or even chocolate. And bees pollinate alfalfa, one of the main crops on which dairy cows feed. Which means that bees affect whether we have milk, cheese and ice cream. In fact, 71 out of 100 crop species which provide 90% of food worldwide are bee-pollinated.

It's simple: without bees, we don't have food. The loss of bees will severely impact \$15 billion of the US's annual food supply if we don't do something.

Based on mounting evidence, many scientists and beekeepers have identified the introduction of neonicotinoid pesticides as a primary reason for pollinator health decline. Neonicotinoids are relatively new class of insecticides that, since their discovery in the 1980s, have become the most widely used insecticide worldwide. Neonicotinoid manufacturers and distributors, such as Dow

Chemical, Bayer, and Monsanto, ramped up the use of these insecticides in the mid-2000s. These insecticides are now sprayed on most flower and tree seeds before they can even be bought in stores, and neonics are available to everyone at hardware stores around the country. In a 2017 sample of honey from around the world, 75 percent of samples from six continents contained a quantifiable amount of at least one neonicotinoid.

Neonics are systemic pesticides: once sprayed or coated on seed, the chemical is taken up into plant tissue and can remain in plants and soil long after application. Many peer-reviewed scientific studies have indicated negative health impacts on both managed and wild pollinators. A 2017 study published in *Science* magazine found a 24 percent decrease in worker bee populations after neonic exposure, and a Canadian study of honeybee populations located near neonic-treated cornfields reported a mortality rate 3.51 times higher than normal.

There is some good news as many garden retailers including Ace Hardware, Home Depot, Lowes, True Value, Walmart, Costco, Kroger and Whole Foods have stopped the retail sale of neonicotinoids in their products. But we can and need to do more.

HB 763, *An Act to protect Massachusetts pollinators* will restrict the use of these pesticides to those certified and licensed applicators and encourage more bee friendly landscaping on some public land. Specifically, the bill will:

- Restrict the use of neonicotinoids to trained certified commercial applicators, private applicators, or licensed applicators.
- Direct the Department of Agriculture to include pollinator protection in applicator training and incorporate neonic limits into the existing pesticide penalty framework.
- Direct MassDOT to consider the opportunities for installation of native forage on department-owned property in the place of turf grass.

We appreciate your support of the bill last session, and hope you will pass it from your committee again this session.