Testimony Transcript

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AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY COMMITTEE

Support for LD 155: Resolve, Directing the Board of Pesticides Control to Prohibit the Use of Certain Neonicotinoids for Outdoor Residential Use

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Hello, my name is Aimee Code. I am the Pesticide Program Director at the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. While I live in Eugene, Oregon, the Xerces Society does have staff that live and work in Maine. My training is in Environmental Health and Toxicology, and my recent academic publications are listed at the end of my testimony. I am here today to offer support for LD155 to prohibit targeted residential uses of neonicotinoids.

Bees and other pollinators are in decline. Their loss puts agriculture and natural systems at risk. Home gardens provide habitat to support these at risk species

Along with managed European honey bees, Maine is home to hundreds of native bee species many of which play important role in agricultural systems. For example, approximately 50 species of native bees are known to pollinate lowbush blueberries. Declines in native bee species has prompted blueberry farmers to rely more heavily on commercial bees. The value of native bees is also evident in alfalfa production. Wild bees trip, allow the pollen to become available for cross- and self- pollination, over 80% of alfalfa flowers visited. Managed leafcutter and honey bees trip only 25%.

Wild bees can be abundant and diverse in cities and urban gardens. Urban residential gardens provide floral and nesting resources for the reproduction and survival of bees. Since many bee species only need a small area to live, home gardens can offer both the resources and the stability pollinators need to establish, and thrive.

Pesticides, especially neonicotinoids, are a key driver in pollinator decline

A number of threats drive pollinator declines, the loss and degradation of habitat, pesticide use, climate change and disease. If we are to protect these important animals, we need to address all aspects of risk.

When assessing the risks of pesticides, nitroguanidine neonicotinoids stand out because they are:

- Highly toxic to bees. Tests submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency demonstrate that minute levels, levels that have been found in the environment, can harm or outright kill bees.

- Long lived. They are very persistent, with half-lives of months and, in some cases, years. Legal use of neonicotinoids on ornamental trees and shrubs can still pose risk to bees the year after the application.
- Readily available to pollinators. Neonicotinoids are systemic, they move into every part of the plant including nectar and pollen, directly exposing pollinators. They are also water soluble, so they can move into water, harming foundational insects that support healthy waterways.
- Commonly used. Neonicotinoids are registered for use on lawns, in gardens, in nursery production and on numerous crops. Some neonicotinoid products intended for home gardeners can be used at higher rates than products registered for use on food crops (causing pollen and nectar of flowers in a home garden to potentially be more contaminated than crop flowers).

Recent assessments by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found significant concerns with residential uses of neonicotinoids. Rather than taking action to restrict access to these concerning neonicotinoid products, they are simply recommending new advisory language on product labels suggesting the public not to use neonicotinoid products. This response falls short of the actions needed to protect pollinators. Under EPA's proposal, these products will still be for sale in places where the public shops for pesticides. Furthermore, people could easily miss the suggestion to avoid use of the products since labels are often upwards of 10 pages and products are packaged such that the labels are accessed after a product is bought.

With LD155, Maine has the opportunity to respond to key risks neonicotinoids pose in residential settings.

LD 155 prompts valuable conservation actions and adds weight to a growing effort to reduce residential uses of neonicotinoids

Across the country and around the world, state and local governments as well as businesses are working to limit the use of neonicotinoids. Both Maryland and Connecticut passed bills that halt targeted neonicotinoid uses. The state of New York is grappling with how best to respond to the risks of neonicotinoids. Dozens of local governments across the country have halted the use of neonicotinoids. Home Depot and Lowe's have committed to phasing out ornamental plants that contain neonicotinoids. The lawn care company Scott's decided to phase out their use of neonicotinoids. While some people may say that state-level legislation to respond to neonicotinoids isn't feasible, the fact that others are already making these changes tells another story.

Thank you for taking the time to consider LD155 as it takes a strategic step to address the concerns posed by neonicotinoids.

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Please see attached testimony. Thank you