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## Children need better protection from chemicals

BY PATRICIA BENSON

As a Christian and faculty member of the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, I am deeply concerned about the next generation, including the world we are leaving to them. We are called as people of faith to protect the health and well-being of all people, developing children being among the most vulnerable.

In recent times it has been well documented that children, especially those from low-income communities and/or communities of color, are disproportionately impacted by the hundreds of chemicals we are exposed to every day. This is an important issue in Detroit. Michigan's senators can make a big difference by passing a package of bills that protect children from dangerous chemicals.

I believe that, as people of faith, the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" compels us to protect the health and well-being of vulnerable populations.

According to scientific research gathered by the National Council of Churches, newborn babies are born with an average of 200 chemicals in their bodies. If a chemical interferes with the body's system during a critical point of development — for example, during a fetus's

eight month in the womb — the consequences can be severe. Although we need a lot more scientific research on the linkages between disease and chemicals, we do know this: These chemicals are in all of us, and more are being introduced to our bodies every day.

In December, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported, for example, that 75 chemicals appear in people's bodies that are not naturally found there.

Scientists say that some chemicals are unsafe at really low doses. Current testing practices most often do not take into account low doses, cumulative exposures, or combinations of chemicals in our body.

Growing scientific evidence indicates linkages between chemicals in consumer products used daily and increased risk of chronic disease — such as asthma, learning disabilities, reproductive disorders and leukemia, all of which are on the rise. Reliable, independent testing has revealed the presence of toxic chemicals like lead and cadmium in children's products.

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By 2005, the federal government had tested only 200 of the over 82,000 chemicals on the market and only banned/restricted 5 chemicals, according to a 2005 Government Accountability Office report.

That is why I am grateful that the Michigan House of Representatives recently passed a

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package of bills called the Children's Safe Products Act. Michigan residents, and everyone else, deserve to know what chemicals we're being exposed to every day. The Children's Safe Products Act will take us in this direction. Manufacturers will be required to disclose the presence of dangerous chemicals in toys and other products designed for kids. Now it is time for the Michigan Senate to pass this bill.

As Christians, we believe our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, a most important reason for taking care of them. We are also called to protect the whole of God's Creation, the body called Earth. For these reasons, I urge our Michigan senators to pass the Children's Safe Products Act as soon as possible.

*Patricia Benson is a faculty member at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit.*

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