



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOW-NYC Calls on DOE to Remove PCBs from Public Schools NOW *PCB-leaking Light Fixtures Cause Birth Defects*

The NYC chapter of the National Organization for Women has called on the Department of Education and Mayor Bloomberg to approve emergency funds to immediately begin replacing PCB-leaking light fixtures in 700 public schools rather than leave them in for the next ten years as proposed.

Doctors and experts agree that NO level of PCB exposure is safe during pregnancy. The dangers of PCB exposure to the reproductive health of women and girls are well documented. Being exposed to PCBs even *years* before pregnancy can have irreversible, long-term consequences, including lowered I.Q. scores, thyroid problems, growth deficits, behavioral problems, reduced immunity, infertility, birth defects and stillbirths. Other health threats of exposure include higher risk of asthma, respiratory infections, diabetes, heart disease, and lower cognitive function.

“For decades to come we could come face-to-face with the tragic outcomes of allowing leaking PCBs from light fixtures to remain in our schools over the next ten years,” said Sonia Ossorio, executive director of NOW-NYC. “No one refutes the science, just the timeframe. The DOE and Mayor Bloomberg say it’s too expensive to remove in the near future. Yet the costs of health care for children born with health problems related to PCB exposure will cost far more. The DOE wants 10 years to change the light fixtures, we want it NOW.”

The failure of the Department of Education to act with a sense of urgency and to continue exposing the students, faculty, and staff of the largest school system in the country to hazardous toxins is unacceptable. When looking at just current high school females—teachers and school staff—the number of women and girls in danger is more than 200,000.

“PCBs bioaccumulate, meaning they build up in little girls’ bodies and stay there for decades,” said Ossorio. “The implications for our students are staggering. Anyone with a heart understands ten years is an absolutely irresponsible amount of time to put our children and our teachers at risk. We call on the Mayor and the DOE to institute an accelerated timeline that acknowledges the scientific data and reflects the real danger of exposure.”

NOW-NYC joined a press conference at City Hall this morning alongside New York Lawyers for Public Interest—who has filed a federal lawsuit against the DOE—teachers, parents, and reproductive health advocates to call for a two-year timeline for completing the switch.

The National Organization for Women is the nation’s largest organization working to advance women’s rights and improve women’s lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to promote women’s reproductive rights, secure women’s economic empowerment, and end violence and discrimination against women.

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