

Written Testimony of the Environmental Working Group

Submitted to the House Education Committee

Of the

Rhode Island General Assembly

On

House Bill 5115, the School Food Dye Restriction Act

February 12, 2025

The Environmental Working Group strongly supports HB 5115.

The evidence that these dyes cause neurobehavioral problems is overwhelming.

The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment conducted an unprecedented, systematic study looking at human evidence of what happens when kids eat dyes, and animal studies of what happens to their brains. California's state scientists conclusively determined that some kids suffer from behavioral effects, and that these dyes change the structure of their brains and how their brains transmit signals. The EU requires a warning label on food containing Red 40, Yellow 5, or Yellow 6, stating that the product "may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children." These dyes are making it harder for some of our kids to learn.

We cannot rely on the FDA to solve this problem. Federal review of food additives is not "comprehensive" or "effective" and regularly allows foods containing hazardous additives to be sold and distributed. In truth, industry's claims are not borne out by the numbers – 99% of new additives placed on the market since 2000 were never approved by the FDA, but rather greenlit by the chemical companies before being sold to the public. The FDA has not thoroughly reviewed the safety of these dyes since the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, long before toxicological studies could detect their effects on our kids' brains.

Banning these colors will have no impact on our school food professionals. Only 3% of the 11,000 foods sold "on the tray," only 2% of foods sold a la carte, and none of the foods available from the USDA's Foods in Schools program for the upcoming school year contain these colors. Food companies can and do reformulate – quickly. When other countries required food companies to put a warning on foods, companies quickly replaced synthetic colors with natural colors.

We urge you to support HB 5115.