

Opening Statement  
Rep. Gene Green  
Health Subcommittee Hearing on “Examining Microbeads in Cosmetic Products”  
May 1, 2015

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairman Pitts for holding today’s hearing and thank our distinguished panelists for joining us this morning to discuss this important issue.

I would also like to recognize the leadership of Chairman and Ranking Member of the full committee, Reps. Fred Upton and Frank Pallone, in coming together in the spirit of bipartisanship and introducing the Microbead-Free Waters Act.

Plastics today are an integral part of daily life. From health care and food preservation to communications and home construction, plastic’s tremendous range of uses is based on its desirable properties, including durability, corrosion resistance, and low cost.

The plastic industry is our nation’s third largest manufacturing industry, responsible for over \$350

billion in economic activity and hundreds of thousands of jobs in our country, with several plastics manufacturers located in my district in Houston and Harris County, Texas.

In much part due to the very properties that make plastic so universal in daily life, plastic can have a negative impact on our environment—all the more so when it is not disposed properly and released into the environment without oversight or restriction.

This is what is currently happening with microplastic particles or microbeads. Microbeads, due to their tiny size—5 millimeters or less—fail to be captured by modern wastewater treatment plants and end up in our nation’s rivers, lakes, and seas.

The accumulation of microbeads in our nation’s waters, particularly the Great Lakes, has been startling in recent years and deserves immediate federal attention. Recent studies in the Great Lakes

have found have debris concentrations, much of it attributable to microbeads, that rival the some of the largest ocean garbage patches.

When released in the environment, microbeads presents a clear risk to our nation's waterways and wildlife, from the physical impacts of wildlife ingestion of microbeads to the harmful chemicals such as PCBs and DDT that can accumulate on these tiny plastic particles.

I am pleased to learn that much of the cosmetic industry, including nationwide manufacturers such as Proctor & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson have voluntarily decided to replace microbeads in their personal care products with natural, biodegradable alternatives such as ground almonds, ground walnuts, coca beans, and sea salt.

Nevertheless, due to the current technical restraints on our nation's wastewater systems, it is necessary

that plastic, non-biodegradable microbeads in cosmetic products be removed from manufacture and sale at the earliest feasible date.

The legislation before us today would provide an appropriate federal response to microbeads by amending the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to prohibit the sale or distribution of cosmetics containing microbeads by January 1, 2018.

I am supportive of this effort and hope that we will use today's hearing to learn if improvements are necessary to this legislation and build momentum towards passage and enactment.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and I yield the remainder of my time.