

Senator Linda R. Greenstein’s Testimony on HR 1321 before the Subcommittee on Health, House Energy & Commerce Committee, hearing entitled “Examining Microbeads in Cosmetic Products”

Washington, D.C.

May 1, 2015

Chairman Upton, Ranking Member Pallone and Members of the Committee, thank you for your invitation to be here today as you consider *HR 1321*, bipartisan federal legislation that is aimed at stopping the entry into our waterways of billions of pieces of small bits of plastic known as “microbeads” ... an effort that is similarly addressed under laws recently enacted in two other states, my own New Jersey and Illinois.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge my home state Congressman and a co-sponsor with Chairman Upton of **HR 1321**, Representative Frank Pallone, whose leadership on environmental issues is legendary in our Garden State and whose invitation to testify is the reason I am here before you this morning. Thank you Congressman.

I mentioned a moment ago that New Jersey is one of two states in the nation that has adopted legislation outlawing the use of these microbeads. They’re used by the personal care products industry in everything from toothpaste to

over-the-counter skin treatments and exfoliants, like facial scrubs.

The problem is that these plastics are so small that they escape catchment screens at our sewage plants and wind up by the billions in our water supplies. As the Chairman is well aware, these microplastics were recently found by research scientists in all five of the Great Lakes as well as in fish that make their home in the Great Lakes and in fish-eating birds.

In New Jersey, much of our drinking water supply is drawn from local waterways like the Delaware or the Passaic rivers, and so we, too, have our issues with microplastics.

That's why once their presence became known, we moved quickly to eliminate them through the bi-partisan legislation that I co-authored. I'd like to note that the bill passed unanimously in the New Jersey Senate and by an overwhelming margin in the Assembly.

And a funny thing happened on the way to this bill being signed into law in Trenton just six weeks ago – groups that can often politely be called “at odds with each other” came together as one in agreement that these plastics should be eliminated from our waterways.

The Chemistry Council of New Jersey, in a position shared by the American Chemistry Council, and their member

companies joined with the Sierra Club and other environmental groups to support our legislative efforts.

But like your effort here in Congress, we also agreed to give the personal care products industry time to adjust and to find alternatives to the plastics now used in these products.

So the New Jersey bill uses a gradual approach to stepping down the production of these synthetic microbeads until they are completely off the market by January 2020. It starts with the elimination of the tiny plastics from use in the manufacture of personal care products beginning January 1st 2018 and then on to prohibiting the sale of such products after January 1st 2019. That's also when over-the-counter drugs using microbeads will be outlawed in New Jersey.

The industry is already turning to natural alternatives to the microbeads, using crushed walnut shells, sea salt and pumice stone, for example, to produce the desired effect that the plastic microbead does.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear today before the Committee and I'm available for any questions Members may have.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you Members.