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November 12, 2020

Corie Barry, CEO  
Best Buy  
7601 Penn Ave. South  
Richfield, MN 55423

**RE: Toxic flame retardants in televisions sold at Best Buy**

Dear Ms. Barry:

On behalf of organizations dedicated to safeguarding children's health, we are writing today to urge Best Buy to phase out the sale of electronics containing organohalogen flame retardants (OFRs) and other toxic flame retardants, starting with televisions.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1 in 6 American children have a learning, attention, or developmental disability.<sup>1</sup> The incidence of these types of disabilities is rising every year at an alarming pace, especially for autism and ADHD. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that environmental factors, including toxic chemicals, cause or contribute to at least a quarter of learning and developmental disabilities in American children. Scientists have learned that the developing human brain is much more susceptible to toxic substances than the adult brain and that even tiny amounts of certain chemicals can do lasting harm to the developing brain at levels that were once thought to be safe.

Scientists are concerned that exposure to organohalogen flame retardants is increasing our risk of developing learning and developmental disabilities.

We are alarmed by a study published last year by the Mind the Store campaign and Toxic-Free Future finding that some Best Buy televisions contained high concentrations of toxic flame retardants.<sup>2</sup> The study found: "Three Best Buy Insignia Roku TVs contained hazardous organohalogen flame retardants. All Best Buy Insignia TVs contained the banned flame retardant deca-BDE, outlawed in five states, including at its purchase location in Washington State; one TV contained deca-BDE at levels above Washington's enforcement limit. The televisions contained flame retardants at percentage levels by weight in the plastic, meaning the chemicals make up a significant portion of the product. These chemicals can migrate out of televisions and get into indoor air, household dust, and make their way into our bodies, posing risks to families and pets."

Studies show that certain organohalogen flame retardants are associated with harm to children's brain capacities that are critical for thinking and success in school.<sup>3</sup> These effects include lower IQ and problems with verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, motor coordination, hyperactivity, impulsivity, and attention.<sup>4</sup> These

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/features/birthdefects-dd-keyfindings.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://toxicfreefuture.org/research/toxic-tv-binge-an-investigation-into-flame-retardants-in-televisions/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp358>

<sup>4</sup> <http://projecttendr.com/chemicals-and-pollutants/pbdes/>



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associations are seen with flame retardant exposures before birth (when mom is pregnant) and in young children. Scientists have found that certain flame retardants disrupt hormones in the body that are essential for normal brain development; and they may affect the developing brain in other ways as well. OFRs have also been associated with many other adverse human health impacts, including reproductive impairment (e.g., abnormal gonadal development, reduced number of ovarian follicles, reduced sperm count, increased time to pregnancy); genotoxicity; cancer; and immune disorders. These chemicals have a disproportionately negative health effect on vulnerable populations, including children.<sup>5,6</sup>

The OFRs that have been found in Best Buy television casings come out of these products into the air and dust of the household environment. This is because they are typically used in the additive form (e.g. not chemically bonded to the materials containing them) and because of their physical-chemical properties.<sup>7</sup> Once released indoors, organohalogen flame retardants will accumulate in indoor dust, and they are persistent in the indoor environment. OFRs enter people's bodies in this contaminated dust—you can breathe it in, touch it, and accidentally get dust in your mouth. Young children have much greater contact with contaminated dust because they crawl, play on the floor, and constantly put their hands in their mouths.

When a woman is pregnant, OFRs in her body can move into the developing fetus, so babies may be exposed to these chemicals before they are born and during breastfeeding. OFRs get into the outdoor environment too; for example, when OFR-containing products are landfilled, incinerated, or recycled, as well as from households through contaminated laundry water. OFRs persist for a long time in the environment and build up in animals and some become more concentrated as they move up the food chain. Consequently, OFRs also enter people's bodies when they eat foods such as fish and meat that contain OFRs.

In fact, because these chemicals migrate out from everyday household products (including televisions and other electronics) into the air and dust, almost all U.S. residents have measurable quantities of toxic organohalogen flame retardants in their blood.

In light of the growing health risks these chemicals pose, governments around the world are acting. In 2017, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issued a guidance warning electronics manufacturers and retailers to “eliminate the use” of organohalogen flame retardants in plastic casings.<sup>8</sup> Additional regulation on organohalogens is moving forward in the European Union (EU), which in October 2019 passed an EU-wide ban on all organohalogen flame retardants in electronics casings that will take effect in 2021.<sup>9</sup>

We hope that you agree that no child or pregnant woman should be exposed to chemicals that may harm their health from televisions and other electronics they have in their homes. As one of the largest electronics retailers in the U.S. and the world, Best Buy has a responsibility to act.

<sup>5</sup> [https://greensciencepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/FHSA-Petition-3-30\\_final.pdf](https://greensciencepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/FHSA-Petition-3-30_final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.1003089>

<sup>7</sup> [https://greensciencepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Diamond\\_Statement.pdf](https://greensciencepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Diamond_Statement.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2017-09-28/pdf/2017-20733.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_19\\_5895](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_5895)



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**We strongly urge you to expand your chemicals policy and expeditiously ban organohalogen flame retardants and other toxic flame retardants in all televisions sold at Best Buy, starting with your private-label televisions.**

We would appreciate your response to our concerns and recommendations by December 4<sup>th</sup>. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tracy Gregoire, Director of the Healthy Children Project  
Learning Disabilities Association of America

Maureen Swanson, Director of Environmental Risk Reduction  
The Arc of the United States

Martha Moriarty, Executive Director  
Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota

Tamara Massey, President  
Learning Disabilities Association of Alabama

Gregg French, President  
Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut

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