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November 9, 2020

Chris Kempczinski, CEO
McDonald's
110 North Carpenter St
Chicago, IL 60607

RE: PFAS in food packaging

Dear Mr. Kempczinski:

On behalf of organizations dedicated to safeguarding children's health, we are writing today to urge McDonald's to phase out and ban the use of all food packaging and food-contact materials that contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1 in 6 American children have a learning, attention, or developmental disability. 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 PFAS chemicals are increasing our risk of developing serious health problems¹ and there is concern that PFAS exposure may impact the growth, learning, and behavior of infants and young children.

We are alarmed by a recent study published by the Mind the Store campaign and Toxic-Free Future that found that some McDonald's food packaging, including the packaging for the Big Mac, may contain PFAS chemicals.² The packaging is used once, but once disposed of, the PFAS chemicals can last forever in the environment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that: "Scientists are still learning about the health effects of exposure to PFAS. Some studies have shown that PFAS exposure may affect growth, learning, and behavior of infants and older children; lower a woman's chance of getting pregnant; interfere with the body's natural hormones; increase cholesterol levels; affect the immune system; and increase the risk of cancer."³

¹ <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.estlett.0c00255>

² <https://saferchemicals.org/packaged-in-pollution/>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0923-cdc-atsdr-award-pfas-study.html>



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In testimony before the U.S. Senate in 2019, Dr. Linda Birnbaum, the former head of the National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and National Toxicology Program (NTP), stated: “The research conducted to date reveals associations between PFAS exposures and a variety of specific adverse human health outcomes. These include the potential for effects on children’s cognitive and neurobehavioral development, immune system dysfunction, endocrine disruption, obesity, diabetes, lipid metabolism, and cancer.”⁴

Biomonitoring studies have shown that nearly every person in the U.S., including newborns, has PFAS in their bloodstream. Drinking water and other dietary sources are considered to be the largest exposure pathway to PFAS. Reducing and eliminating PFAS in food packaging could help reduce our exposure to these chemicals.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has stated that, in general, infants and children are more vulnerable to chemical exposures and that substantial improvements to the food additives regulatory system are urgently needed. But at a time when the federal government is failing to meaningfully regulate chemicals such as PFAS in food contact materials, it is more important than ever for businesses like McDonald’s to act.

Other major quick-service restaurants including Cava, Chipotle, Freshii, Panera Bread, Sweetgreen, and Taco Bell have announced action to eliminate PFAS chemicals in food packaging. In contrast, McDonald’s has not announced a clear policy or timeline to phase out and ban these harmful chemicals.

We hope that we can agree that no child or pregnant woman should be exposed to chemicals that may harm their health through the food they eat. As the largest fast-food chain in the U.S. and the world, McDonald’s has a responsibility to act.

We strongly urge you to adopt a public policy to expeditiously ban PFAS in all McDonald’s food packaging and food-contact materials in the United States and globally. We also urge you to adopt a comprehensive safer chemicals policy to ensure other hazardous chemicals, such as *ortho*-phthalates and bisphenols, are also not used in McDonald’s food-contact materials.

We would appreciate your response to our concerns and recommendations by December 1st. 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

Bev Johns, President
Learning Disabilities Association of Illinois

⁴ https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/2/2/22ca7c4b-b1dc-4a12-9264-7a4f16608933/BF2D70A4FB747A3F61E584CC30D58D0A.birnbaum-testimony-03.28.2019.pdf



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