Memorandum of Support

May 26, 2021

S.699-B (Hoylman)/A.7429 (Englebright)

Purpose: Enacts the Birds and Bees Protection Act; prohibits the sale of certain pesticides or use of seeds coated with such pesticides; requires the department of environmental conservation to review the latest scientific information concerning certain pesticide active ingredients.

Statement of Support: In only the past few years, populations of honeybees in hives have reduced by at least 40% due to what has been termed “colony collapse syndrome.” While invasive mites and pathogens, habitat loss, and the impacts of climate change are all factors in the decline of pollinators, scientific consensus is now focused on the impact of neonicotinoids. Widespread neonic contamination in New York harms birds, bees, fish, and other wildlife, pollutes water, and likely affects human health. A recent Cornell University review of 1,121 peer-reviewed studies identifies key high-cost, low-benefit neonic uses that are easily replaceable with safer alternatives or in many cases nothing at all. The Report shows that targeted prohibitions on wasteful uses of neonics could prevent 80-90% of outdoor use neonics from entering New York’s soil and water.¹

The Birds and Bees Protection Act would place a ban on neonic-treated corn and soybean seeds, which represent 73% of the neonics used in NYS agriculture. The Report finds they provide “no overall net-income benefits” to users, making them the most widespread and least justifiable use of neonics in the state. The legislation would also impose a ban on turf and ornamental neonic uses, with the exception of use in treatment against invasive species like hemlock wooly adelgid and emerald ash borer. Lawn and garden uses of neonics pose some of the greatest risks to pollinators, yet the Cornell Report finds most are not needed or easily replaceable with safer alternatives. Lastly, the Birds and Bees Protection Act would require DEC to review all neonic pesticides and consider whether any should be listed as “restricted use” along with any protections needed to protect the health of New York’s birds and bees.

We cannot afford to lose our pollinators, much less the thousands of other species interconnected with these essential insects. New York can be a leader in science-based neonic regulation by eliminating unjustified high-cost, low-benefit neonic uses. This reasonable approach would not prevent invasive species treatment or any agricultural uses beyond treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds, and it would benefit pollinators, our state’s farmers who depend on them, New York’s ecosystems, and all New Yorkers who value clean soil, clean water, and their own health.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.699-B/A.7429