

Oral Testimony to the Mosquito Control Task Force

Delivered by Drew Toher, Beyond Pesticides

On behalf of the MASSQuito Coalition

Feb. 10, 2022

Hello All,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to speak. I am Drew Toher, community resource and policy director at Beyond Pesticides, a national nonprofit dedicated to educating the public about the hazards of pesticides and encouraging alternatives to their use. We at Beyond Pesticides are proud members of the MASSQuito coalition, consisting of 15 local, state, and national organizations working to enact sound mosquito control that protects public health and the environment. I am providing these comments on behalf of the MASSQuito coalition and the residents our coalition represents.

Mosquito management in the twenty first century must shift away from a reliance on chemical controls that harm people and wildlife towards an ecological approach that prioritizes preventative measures.

To that end, we are cautiously optimistic regarding the outlined recommendations produced by the Mosquito Task Force.

The development of a state-wide mosquito management plan will provide consistency in administration and allow for a more substantive evaluation of efficacy. We support the repeal and replacement of century-old enabling legislation in favor of a restructured oversight board and we wish to reinforce the need for independent experts to participate on this board.

It is incredibly important, however, that any statewide plan include baseline surveillance and monitoring capacity for all communities in the Commonwealth and provide allowances for community choice. We support the recommendation for a menu-based approach outlined by the local engagement and policy subcommittees, as well as the development of an online system to track residential opt-outs.

We support the need for additional oversight of pesticide products used in mosquito management. This approach will increase public awareness of pesticide risks, but stronger provisions are needed to encourage use of least toxic, yet still effective mosquito management products. We likewise urge stronger measures to ensure that products containing PFAS are not used where they can contaminate rivers, lakes, and drinking water, and harm Massachusetts residents or the environment.

This Task Force is in large part an outgrowth of resident concern over the state-wide practice of broad scale aerial applications of adulticides across local communities without their approval. Therefore, we strongly support the best practice subcommittee's recommendation to prohibit all aerial spraying in the state due to lack of proven efficacy, and the risk of human and ecological harm.

In place of aerial spraying, we strongly support the recommendation to develop a statewide education program, and the local engagement recommendation to promote creative ways to engage the public. This approach will assist communities and mosquito control districts in lowering local mosquito populations, thereby reducing disease vectors and nuisance complaints.

By and large we thank the 21st century mosquito task force for the hard work that has gone into producing these recommendations. We now call on lawmakers to incorporate these important recommendations through legislation that establishes Massachusetts as a leader in 21st century ecologically sound mosquito management.

On behalf of the MASSQuito coalition, thank you for your time.