

Representative Mitzi Johnson
Speaker of the House

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HOUSE SPEAKER MITZI JOHNSON'S STATEMENT ON THE VETO OF THE MEDICAL MONITORING BILL

"Today the Governor chose corporations that pollute over Vermonters' health when he vetoed the Medical Monitoring Bill, S.37. When corporations pollute our environment or water supply with toxic chemicals or expose Vermont workers to harmful chemicals, they should be held accountable for their wrongdoing.

"In the legislature, we are working hard to pass policies that ensure our state works for all of us, not just the privileged few. Yet our families and communities cannot thrive if our Governor continues to prioritize protecting corporations over people.

"We must do better. Vermonters should be protected from exposure to harmful chemicals and helped when they are impacted by toxic contamination. Vermont faced a hard and very frightening reality when the toxic chemical PFOA was found in the drinking water around Bennington. When corporate polluters wrongfully expose Vermonters to toxic substances known to cause diseases, like PFOA, the entity profiting from that pollution - not the individuals harmed - should bear the costs of monitoring health impacts. It is outrageous that the Governor is siding with corporations over Vermonters with his veto of the Medical Monitoring Bill.

"Medical monitoring allows for the earliest detection and treatment of the diseases caused by toxic chemical exposure. Similar to early detection efforts such as mammograms and colonoscopies, this program encourages early detection and early treatment interventions to ensure the best possible health outcomes at the lowest cost.

"To protect businesses, S.37 does not allow frivolous or unfounded claims. A high burden of proof is required to access assistance. Individuals would have to convince a judge or jury that a company wrongfully exposed them to a known toxic substance; that the exposure increases their risk of developing a latent disease and could credibly trigger the need for medical monitoring; and that there are diagnostic tests that can detect the latent disease. Yet the Governor would still have Vermonters bear the cost of their own health monitoring and treatment even after a judicial decision agreed that the polluter was responsible. I disagree with the Governor who thinks this places too much responsibility on businesses. There is a high burden of proof in the bill required to mitigate this concern, while providing a path for Vermonters to receive a remedy that is not available under current law.

"100 House members and 19 Senators supported this bill in tri-partisan votes when it passed in May. The right thing to do is to pass this legislation and to support Vermonters over corporations, and I look forward to taking this bill up again in January."