



Representative Tina Liebling, Chair
Health Finance and Policy Committee

March 8, 2023

Chair Liebling and Committee Members,

My name is Amira Adawe, I'm the Executive Director of the Beautywell Project. I'm Public Health Practitioner and Researcher. I have been working on combating skin-lightening practice and chemical exposures for past 12 years and this is an issue that is impacting the health outcomes of many individuals, families and communities. I'm writing in support of HF 2236 Skin-lightening Products Public Awareness and Education Grant Program.

Skin-lightening, whitening, and bleaching products are prolific in Black and Brown communities throughout the world, but they have had a particularly strong impact in the U.S. Skin-lightening products come in many different forms, including soaps, creams, lotions and ingestible pills. This is a massive industry: Globally, it's estimated market value is \$8.3 billion, and the U. S. market alone is an estimated \$2.3 billion. Given the size of this industry, it is critical that we raise awareness of the health and psychological impact of these toxic products. It is highly unregulated, diffuse, and the products are sold in venues from high end retail stores to community corner stores. Products contain a range of harmful chemicals including mercury and hydroquinone, that promise to lighten skin or reduce dark spots, but these products can have a range of negative impacts including on a person's reproductive and neurological health. We are especially worried about the impact it can have for women's health, not only on their reproductive health but also negative kidney effects, neurological problems and early childhood developmental problems, given what we know about mercury's negative developmental impacts. Many consumers are unaware of the dangers associated with the use or misuse of these products. For example, we have seen individuals that had higher mercury in their urine due to use of skin-lightening products. Women in Minnesota from the Somali community lost her vision due to mercury exposure from skin-lighting cream.

In order to address this huge health disparity that is disproportionately impacting communities of color we need to get support to expand the current outreach and education we are doing to combat skin-lightening and chemical exposures. This bill HF 2236 will provide support to address the issue of skin-lightening practice and chemical exposures and will give an opportunity to use multiple intervention approaches.

Please support House File 2236.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'AA' with a stylized flourish.

Amira Adawe, MPH

Executive Director, the Beautywell Project

Amira.adawe@thebeautywell.org

612-250-4263