

Public Safety Committee
Tear Gas / Chemical Irritant Cleanup Legislation

Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Colin Hortman. I am the son of the late Mark and Melissa Hortman. I am submitting this testimony to describe the process my family faced in cleaning up my parents' home after law enforcement deployed tear gas and other chemical irritants inside the house. This was my childhood home, the place where I grew up, where I learned to cook with my mom, and where I built robots with my dad. After my parents were murdered, that home also became the place where my family had to navigate a long and confusing cleanup process that I would not want any other family to go through.

After the incident, law enforcement deployed tear gas throughout the home because they believed the perpetrator might still be inside. I was never given an exact number of devices used, but I know there were at least a dozen canisters, with at least one deployed in every room, and sometimes more than one. The deployment caused obvious physical damage to the house, including broken windows, damaged blinds, and drywall that had to be replaced. The less visible damage, however, came from the chemical residue left behind.

We were told early on that the active effects of tear gas would only last a few days. In reality, the residue remained much longer. When I went into the home during the first week to try to collect sentimental items, the powder left behind still irritated my skin, my eyes, and my sinuses. Every step on the carpet and every item I moved kicked more of the irritant into the air. At the time, I did not understand that the residue could still be hazardous or that proper protective equipment should be worn when entering a contaminated space.

Because of the amount of residue, we were not truly able to enter the home safely for months. The actual remediation was not completed until nearly eight months later. During that time, the house could not be lived in, could not be sold, and could not even be fully accessed without risking exposure to the chemicals that had been used.

One of the biggest challenges we faced was simply figuring out what had been deployed inside the house. When we first contacted the remediation contractor, they asked us what chemicals had been used so they could determine how to test and clean the home. We did not know. We worked with the contractor to request that information from the city. The records we received did not clearly state exactly what was used or how much. Instead, we were sent safety data sheets for several different chemical agents that could have been deployed. Without knowing the specific type and amount used, it was difficult for the professionals to determine the proper scope of cleanup.

We also learned during this process that under Minnesota law, the agency that deploys tear gas is responsible for the cost of cleanup. However, this was not something we knew at the beginning. Our homeowners insurance initially denied coverage because the residue was considered a pollutant. It took time, and help from professionals, to understand that the city was responsible and to figure out how to request the cleanup be done correctly.

Even after responsibility was established, there were disagreements about what proper remediation required. Initial suggestions involved basic cleaning, but the remediation professionals told us that because of the number of devices used, the home needed specialized filtration, neutralizing chemicals, protective equipment, and thorough decontamination in order to be safe. This back-and-forth added more time to a process that was already emotionally difficult.

After working with lawyers, remediation professionals, experts in the chemical field and state workers we hired a company to test for chemicals in the home. The testing company that we hired took a much more comprehensive sampling and followed industry standards in a way that the insurance company testing company did not. The test revealed the extent of the residue left inside, on the walls, and in the carpet. The same scope that the contractor originally recommended now had the evidence to firmly state the correct clean up procedures. Finally the city insurance company agreed to a settlement that included paying for the full scope of work that was presented in the first few weeks. This delay, confusion, and overall process was agonizing.

My family was in a position where we could wait for the cleanup to be done correctly. Many people are not. When tear gas is used in someone's home, they may still be living there, they may need to sell the home, or they may need the cleanup completed quickly in order to move on with their lives. Without clear information about what chemicals were used, and without clear guidance about what proper remediation requires, families can feel pressure to accept whatever cleanup is offered, even if it is not enough to remove hazardous residue.

I am sharing this experience because I want future victims to have a clearer path than we did. At a minimum, homeowners should be told exactly what chemical agents were used, how much was used, and should be given the safety data sheets immediately. Remediation professionals should not have to guess what may have been deployed, and families should not have to spend months trying to get basic information about what is inside their own home.

Clear notice requirements and better documentation would make this process faster, safer, and less traumatic for people who are already going through one of the worst experiences of their lives.

Thank you for your time and for your work to help future victims.

Colin Hortman



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March 16, 2026

Dear Chair Liebling and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Gender Justice, we write in strong support of HF3782, legislation requiring notice and disclosure when chemical irritants, smoke screens, or diversionary devices are deployed by law enforcement within buildings.

Gender Justice is a nonprofit legal and policy organization dedicated to advancing gender equity through the law. Our work centers bodily autonomy, reproductive freedom, and the ability of all people, particularly those most impacted by discrimination, to live safe and healthy lives.

The use of chemical agents by law enforcement is not only a public safety issue; it is also a matter of racial justice, reproductive justice, and government accountability. Communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income neighborhoods are disproportionately impacted by aggressive policing practices, including the deployment of chemical irritants. These same communities already face higher rates of environmental health burdens and barriers to medical care, making transparency about chemical exposure especially critical.

When chemical agents are used indoors, their effects do not end when officers leave. Residue can persist on surfaces, in ventilation systems, and in personal belongings, exposing residents for days or weeks afterward. Without clear notice and disclosure, people may unknowingly remain in contaminated spaces, putting themselves and their families at risk.

Emerging research raises serious concerns about reproductive health impacts. A 2023 study from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health found that 83 percent of people exposed to tear gas or similar chemical agents reported at least one adverse reproductive health outcome, including uterine cramping, abnormal menstrual bleeding, delayed cycles, and breast tenderness. Individuals with repeated exposure experienced significantly higher odds of negative outcomes. These findings highlight that so-called "less lethal" weapons can have profound effects on reproductive and perinatal health.

From a reproductive justice perspective, the right to have children, not have children, and raise families in safe and healthy environments cannot be separated from freedom from state violence and toxic exposure. When chemical agents are deployed in homes, particularly in multi-unit housing, pregnant people, children, elders, and individuals with chronic health conditions may face risks without even knowing what they have been exposed to.

Transparency is also essential for police accountability. Disclosure requirements do not prevent law enforcement from performing their duties; they simply ensure that the public has access to basic information about substances released into their homes and communities. Providing notice and product information allows building owners, tenants, cleanup professionals, insurers, and healthcare providers to take appropriate action and prevents avoidable harm.

This bill takes a practical approach. It requires notice to occupants, allows affected parties to request information about the specific products used, and directs the Commissioner of Public Safety to create a standard notification form. Minnesota has been at the center of national conversations about policing, racial equity, and public safety. Supporting this legislation is a concrete step toward ensuring that public safety practices do not come at the expense of community health, bodily autonomy, or civil rights. No Minnesotan should return to a home contaminated by chemical agents without being informed about what was used and how to protect themselves.

For these reasons, Gender Justice respectfully urges you to support HF3782.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the health, dignity, and safety of all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Megan" and last name "Peterson" clearly distinguishable.

Megan Peterson
Executive Director, Gender Justice