



March 7, 2025

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: HB1910/SB1289 – Request for Signature

Dear Governor Youngkin:

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) urges you to sign HB1910/SB1289, a bill that would prohibit harmful color additives in Virginia school food. Specifically, the bill would prohibit schools from serving or selling food containing Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 3, Red 40, Yellow 5, and Yellow 6, synthetic dyes that have been shown to cause neurobehavioral issues in some children. This bill is urgently needed to protect Virginia’s children from chemicals that do not belong in school food.

Synthetic food dyes can cause neurobehavioral problems in some children, according to the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA).¹ In 2021, experts at CalEPA performed a peer-reviewed systematic review of the evidence, including 27 human clinical trials, and concluded that consumption of synthetic food dyes “can cause or exacerbate neurobehavioral problems in some children.” CalEPA asserted that for affected children, repeated, short-term increases in inattentiveness, restlessness, and anxiety could reduce children’s social and academic success. Dyes with the potential to cause negative health, social, and academic outcomes should not be allowed in school food. CalEPA’s report concluded by recommending that, at a minimum, these adverse effects should be acknowledged and steps should be taken to reduce children’s exposure to these dyes.

In 2024, California became the first state to prohibit synthetic dyes in school food.² Several other states have introduced similar bills, recognizing the need to protect children’s health. Despite clear evidence from CalEPA, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has failed to take significant steps to protect school-aged children in the four years since the CalEPA report was published. While the FDA recently banned Red 3 – over 30 years after it was found to cause cancer in animals – Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 1, Blue 2, and Green 3 remain legal under federal law. It is crucial that HB1910/SB1289 is signed into law to remove these dyes from Virginia school food, helping to ensure that all students can achieve their fullest potential.

¹Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, California Environmental Protection Agency. *Health Effects Assessment: Potential Neurobehavioral Effects of Synthetic Food Dyes in Children*. April 16, 2021. <https://oehha.ca.gov/media/downloads/risk-assessment/report/health-effects-assessment041621.pdf>. Accessed February 14, 2025.

² The California School Food Safety Act. https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB2316.

The chemicals targeted by this bill are unnecessary additives. The seven chemicals to be prohibited by this bill are color additives that offer no nutritional benefits and have no impact on food safety. They function simply to make foods visually appealing as a marketing tool for the food industry, meaning that eliminating these dyes from school food will not negatively impact food's nutritional quality or safety. Moreover, alternatives not known to have these adverse effects already exist. Carotenes and fruit juice, for example, are used to color Kellogg's® Froot Loops® in the EU and Canada, respectively, while the U.S. version is made with synthetic dyes.^{3,4,5} Food companies removing synthetic dyes from products sold in schools have access to several safer, colorful alternatives.

Many children rely on school food for their daily nutrition. In the 2022-2023 school year, Virginia public schools served over 386,000 breakfasts and 697,000 lunches on average daily – over a million meals served every day.⁶ It is critical that these meals are safe. This bill will make school food, whether provided in school meals or purchased as snacks or a la carte items, safer for all students and could especially benefit those who, without school meals, would not have access to adequate nutrition.

To protect children, the Virginia Legislature should ban synthetic dyes from school food. Where FDA has chosen not to act, Virginia can. The chemicals listed in this bill have documented health harms, especially for children. These chemicals are unnecessary in the food supply. We therefore ask you to sign HB1910/SB1289 and prohibit Virginia schools from serving synthetic food dyes to children.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Meghan Enslow, MPH
Policy Associate
Center for Science in the Public Interest

³ Kellogg's. *Froot Loops*. n.d. https://www.kelloggs.fr/fr_FR/products/froot-loops.html. Accessed: February 14, 2025.

⁴ WK Kellogg Co. *Froot Loops*. n.d. <https://www.wkkellogg.ca/en-ca/products/froot-loops-cereal-product.html>. Accessed February 14, 2025.

⁵ Kellogg's. *Kellogg's® Froot Loops® Breakfast Cereal*. n.d. https://www.frootloops.com/en_US/our-products/froot-loops-cereal.html. Accessed February 14, 2025.

⁶ FitzSimons, C., Hayes, C. *The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch During the 2022-2023 School Year*. Food Research & Action Center. March 2024. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Reach-Report-2024.pdf>. Accessed February 14, 2025.