

# I Tagged Along With Beautycounter to Lobby for Beauty Industry Reform in Washington, D.C.

*“I didn’t feel the world needed another beauty brand per se. What I felt it needed was a movement.”*

By Lesa Hannah | Date October 16, 2018



It’s a chilly March morning in Washington, D.C., and just outside the steps of the Capitol Building, Gregg Renfrew is wearing a navy puffer and New Balance sneakers while hopping up and down to try and stay warm. The founder and CEO of Beautycounter is huddled with staff, and around her, over 100 consultants from across the United States have joined them for a day of meetings to lobby for the Personal Care Products Safety Act, a bipartisan bill to reform the regulation of beauty products (cosmetic and otherwise) to ensure the safety of their ingredients. Once everyone is herded together for a group photo, Renfrew addresses them. “This is the reason I started the company,” she bellows.

That was back in 2013. Renfrew created a beauty brand that made products that met her own needs and desires: high performing but significantly safer than the conventional ones she was used to using and in visually appealing packaging. But she didn’t stop there; she made activism an integral part of the company and visited the Hill in D.C. the following year. “I didn’t feel the world needed another beauty brand per se,” she says. “What I felt it needed was a movement.”

*“I didn’t feel the world needed another beauty brand per se. What I felt it needed was a movement.”*

And that’s the point of today in Washington. Major laws surrounding the regulation of beauty products in the United States have not been updated since 1938, restricting and banning only 30 ingredients. (In Canada, we’ve done that with around 600).

Beautycounter, however, bans the use of 1,500 ingredients that it believes to be of concern. So Renfrew has brought her consultants to meet with the staff of the senators to lobby for support of the bill, which was introduced in 2015 by senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Susan Collins (R-ME). “It’s their job to hear from people who live in their state,” says Lindsay Dahl, Beautycounter’s vice president of social and environmental responsibility, of senators’ offices. “It’s refreshing for them to hear personal stories in an otherwise cerebral city.”

In the conference room inside the office of Michael Bennet, senator of Colorado, two Beautycounter consultants meet with one of the members of his staff, health policy advisor Rita Habib. They outline some of the shortcomings they see with the bill, such as clearer definitions of safety and that it needs to be stricter as to what can be labeled natural and organic. They share their experiences with beauty products that became turning points: for one consultant, she bought a body wash for her kids from a dollar store not realizing how bad the ingredients were. For the other, she used a chemical sunscreen spray on her son, who then developed a rash.

*“They may not agree on how we go about it, but I think everyone can agree that we need to protect our health.”*

The day continues on like this. And despite the fact that there are only 21 women on the Senate and this is often dismissed as a women’s issue, Renfrew feels the cause has definite momentum. “We know we’re making inroads,” Renfrew says. “They may not agree on how we go about it, but I think everyone can agree that we need to protect our health.” That said, she stresses how important it is to them that it’s the *right* bill. “We’re really holding our feet to the fire to make sure these harmful chemicals are removed from the market as a result of federal legislation,” she says. “We want it to happen but we’re in it for the long haul.”

*“We want it to happen but we’re in it for the long haul.”*

Here at home, Beautycounter consultants meet with members of Parliament to voice their concerns and Dahl is working closely with Environmental Defense—the lead non-profit advocating for environmental change in Canada—on strengthening cosmetic regulations. While we’re ahead of the United States in terms of regulations, Renfrew believes “there’s still work to be done.” That includes the loophole that allows companies to not list ingredients if they fall under the category fragrance. “It keeps consumers in the dark about common allergens and hormone-disrupting chemicals,” explains Renfrew. The other issue is metals in cosmetics. Both are concerns she’d like to see included in future Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) reviews.

*“It keeps consumers in the dark about common allergens and hormone-disrupting chemicals.”*

Unlike other beauty brands that throw around the word “toxic,” Beautycounter steers clear of that rhetoric, believing that it’s negative and prohibitive. “We talk about the ingredients that we choose to use,” she says. “That said, we do share information that can scare people because most assume that their government is protecting them.” But, above all, Renfrew believes that Beautycounter’s role is “to create higher performing, safer products, to educate the consumer, to advocate tirelessly and to change the industry and the world.”