



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
February 26, 2007

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House Bill 5747 - An Act Requiring Notification to the Department of Public Health of Positive Lyme Disease Results

The Department of Public Health provides the following information with regard to House Bill 5747.

The Department has conducted surveillance to monitor the impact of Lyme disease since 1987 by collecting and analyzing Lyme disease case reports from physicians and other health care providers. This information is used to determine trends and where in the state this disease is most common. We report cases that meet the national surveillance criteria to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for inclusion in the national case counts, also collected for purposes of monitoring trends. Positive laboratory test results alone are not sufficient to satisfy state or national reporting criteria for Lyme disease. However, it is possible to follow-up on laboratory reports to obtain clinical information that can then result in additional case reports.

Laboratory reporting can provide a stimulus to physicians and other health care providers to report cases they may not have previously reported, but House Bill 5747 is not necessary to accomplish this. In December 2006, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health added Lyme disease to the list of laboratory reportable significant findings. Laboratories with automated electronic reporting to the Department are now required to report positive findings of Lyme disease. Laboratories without automated electronic reporting will not be required to report until they have automated electronic laboratory reporting. Most clinical laboratories in Connecticut should be able to report electronically by the end of 2008 or 2009. Electronic laboratory reporting will improve the Department's capability, timeliness, and efficiency in monitoring the occurrence of many diseases, including Lyme disease.

The one potential difference between House Bill 5747 and the current laboratory reporting requirement is that House Bill 5747 would require all clinical laboratories in Connecticut to notify the Department of positive Lyme disease laboratory tests, including laboratories that are not yet able to report electronically. These laboratories will have to mail paper reports to the Department. To make these data useful, Department staff will need to manually enter these reports into an electronic database and then identify and contact the physicians who ordered these tests to obtain the clinical information needed for reporting purposes. The burden this process will place on laboratories and DPH is illustrated by data collected during 1998-2002 when Lyme disease surveillance in Connecticut included laboratory reporting. During this period, 1.5 federally funded FTEs were needed by the Department to process the 38,000 mostly falsely positive Lyme disease laboratory reports. Only 25% of these laboratory reports resulted in identification of cases of Lyme disease. In contrast, 62% of reports initiated by physicians provided enough information to identify cases and did not require repeated follow-up by mail or by phone.

The Department is committed to providing Connecticut with a sustainable Lyme disease surveillance system that includes reporting by both health care providers and licensed clinical laboratories. Requiring reporting by laboratories that are not ready to report electronically will not be useful, as the Department has neither the staff nor funding to follow-up on the results. We believe we should phase in reporting as laboratories implement electronic reporting.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.

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