

MELVIN SIMON

26 Winterset Lane West Hartford, CT 06117

860 493 2200

Madame and Mr. Chairman, Members of the Public Health Committee, I appear today to comment on Raised Bill 579, An Act Concerning Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, commonly known as MRSA. This legislation proposes to mandate that each hospital in Connecticut develop a plan to reduce the incidence of persons contracting MRSA at such hospital. While this may have been a commendable first step twenty five years ago when Antibiotic resistant infections first began appearing in our state's hospitals, given the number of preventable deaths that occur each year this is too little too late.

Ladies and Gentleman, with all due respect to the drafters of the proposed legislation, you should strongly consider amending the legislation to include the provisions supported by Attorney General Richard Blumenthal which would mandate screening for MRSA upon admission and reporting of the number of positive results to the Department of Public Health and the public. Only legislation including these provisions will allow our State Public Health officials and the public to be truly informed as to how hospitals are addressing this scourge. Two decades of benign response by most of Connecticut's hospitals tells us that only through public disclosure and informed consumer pressure will MRSA prevention become a priority.

MRSA is not a new problem in Connecticut or America's hospitals. Hospital contracted MRSA deaths have been growing steadily for nearly two decades. Screening and precautionary measures implemented throughout the Hospital industry in Europe have dramatically reduced the rate of contraction and deaths. Even here in the United States where the vast majority of hospitals refuse to implement proper screening and prophylactic measures, those hospital such as our own Stamford Hospital that have seriously addressed the issue have reaped the benefits of reduced occurrences.

Why do I come here today asking for your serious consideration of an amendment to the proposed legislation? I am a MRSA victim. Today you will hear (or have heard) my wife Carrie's story. She is a childhood cancer survivor who every day requires medical attention or pharmaceutical intervention to overcome the long term effects of the radiation treatments that saved her life as a teenager. Together we are major consumers of hospital services and the medical profession. We are well educated. She is a public school teacher with a master's degree and I a practicing attorney. We make our decisions regarding her medical care after research and careful consultation with professionals. Yet when three years ago she needed aortic valve replacement and we considered hospitals throughout the country we had never heard of MRSA. The term did not enter our lives until it had infected her sternal wound prompting her heart arrhythmia and nearly caused her death. For the next two and half months she together with some of the best heart surgeons and infectious disease professionals literally fought for her life. She survived but 25% of those who contract MRSA do not.

With this legislation, as amended, MRSA will cease to be a mystery, and hospitals will be encouraged to fight its spread. The hospital industry will argue that they are better suited to address this issue. Don't be fooled. With some modest exceptions they have not. The hospital industry will tell you that this legislation will increase the costs of medical care and be borne by consumers. The cost of screening and prophylactic measures is nominal in comparison to the cost in human lives and unnecessary medical care. Pass the legislation as amended and MRSA rates will drop. Pass the bill as proposed and MRSA rates will continue to grow. Today we are talking about legislation but I can guarantee you that if you leave this to the marketplace as the proposed legislation would do, we will be back next year and I guarantee that one of you will have a loved one or friend contract MRSA. Let the marketplace address this and the year after two or more of you will join the club. If your loved one is lucky they will survive MRSA but the cost of the cure will be as in my wife's case \$500,000, months of hospitalization and rehab; an absent parent. I can tell you from my experience that the dollars expended are the easiest to measure the time and trauma on her and her three children and husband are immeasurable even now. Please amend this legislation and help inform the public of which hospitals are addressing this issue so that our state's citizens can be informed and help end the growth of MRSA. If you do you will help to save both lives and money.