

Public Health Committee  
HB 6391, An Act Concerning Revisions to the HIV Testing Consent Law  
Testimony of Sarah Kolb  
March 6, 2009

Good Morning Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Sarah Kolb and I am a graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work.

Today, I am here in my capacity as a graduate student testifying in support of HB 6391, An Act Concerning Revisions to the HIV Testing Consent Law which would implement the Governor's budget recommendations and facilitate the national recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to routinely offer HIV counseling and testing to all adults living in the United States by minimizing legal requirements and barriers to obtaining oral consent for testing.

Last summer I had the privilege to study abroad in Prague, Czech Republic. While I was studying in Prague, I visited a HIV/AIDS clinic. During my visit at the clinic, I realized how this disease impacts the daily lives of children and adults and the urgency for care. While this issue first came to my attention when studying in Eastern Europe, it is a huge problem here in Connecticut. I quickly realized how people underestimate the danger of this disease.

According to the statistics from the CT Department of Public Health HIV/AIDS Surveillance Reports, proportionately, Connecticut leads the nation in the number of AIDS cases among injecting drug users; third in cases among women; and third in the nation in cases among Latino/as. Ultimately, this bill will allow for prevention and early detection of the disease at a lower cost to society. Strong evidence has indicated that early detection and treatment is an effective strategy for preventing the spread of the HIV/AIDS.

By streamlining HIV testing, the intention would be to decrease the stigma that still currently surrounds HIV/AIDS. However, by minimizing the requirements for pre-and post-test counseling and potentially eliminating it from the testing process, you miss a crucial opportunity to discuss treatment options and educate the patient about the disease. It is also important to take into consideration language and cognitive barriers of patients when moving forward with the CDC's recommendation to incorporate HIV testing as a part of routine medical examination. While I do support the need for early detection and prevention, I do believe that requiring pre-and post-test counseling is an important component of the testing process.

As a graduate social work student, I feel this is a widely unfamiliar topic in the public health community and a very complex issue that deserves the attention of the legislature. Many people may enter clinics only after their HIV infection has developed into full-blown AIDS, where it may be too late to treat. Early detection could allow an infected individual the opportunity to live their natural lifespan without developing AIDS.

I would like to thank the committee for introducing HB 6391 and the opportunity to testify in favor of the bill. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.