

Written Testimony regarding

H. B. No. 6391 AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE HIV TESTING CONSENT LAW

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to you today to support H.B. No. 6391. It is a major public health issue that needs to be addressed and whose time has come. In the early 80s and 90s it was important to protect people from getting tested for HIV without their knowledge due to the overwhelming stigma associated with the disease, but those times have changed. Today, HIV is not a death sentence, but it is important to screen individuals for this virus and be able to treat them effectively in order to ensure a good and long quality of life. AIDS is now a chronic disease that is easily managed and controlled with proper care, just as diabetes or cancer can be when diagnosed early. This care can come in medications, follow-up medical visits, and education. The use of antiretroviral therapy can, if given at the optimal time can offer a person the opportunity to have a near normal life span. Yes, medication treatment and follow-up care is costly, but the cost to society and the healthcare system when an individual comes for care in later stages of the disease because they did not know of their status is overwhelming. Studies show that individuals with knowledge of their disease are more likely to practice safer behaviors, but also early detection helps to promote HIV control through partner notification programs, all of which translate into more protections for society.

As a gay man who is HIV positive, I know the pain and distress of being told that I have a virus that may eventually kill me. I understand the fear of facing my mortality, but knowing that I am an HIV positive individual, I have been better able to protect myself and my partners from this disease. I have been able to get medical care and medications that have allowed me to be healthy with no additional medical issues for the last eight years. Knowing that I have as near a normal life span ahead of me I managed to build a career, return to grad school, and set long term goals for myself. This was not possible 20 years and this isn't possible when you don't know. Also as a person who works in the HIV/AIDS research and public health field, I also understand the importance of identification of a disease for society and for the individual. And, in this time of increased fiscal penny pitching, it is important to work to find ways to help lower the costs of treatment and care. Identifying and treating the disease is more cost-effective than being diagnosed in later stages. Living is much cheaper than dying in the United States.

I have spoken to many people over the years and many have told me they will not go and get an HIV test because they do not want to get the pre- and post-test counseling. They do not feel that counseling is beneficial to them. This requirement currently stands as a barrier and in public health it is important to work to remove the barrier to allow people to get the necessary treatment and care they desire and deserve. I had the pre- and post-test counseling as part of my HIV testing. I honestly can't tell you what I was asked. I can't remember anything that was shared with me about the disease. Counseling after my positive result was important and helpful, just as counseling for any major diagnosis would be, but as part of the testing process, was just uncomfortable and unnecessary and often made me reconsider getting tested in general as it was a huge time commitment. You do not need to have pre- and post-test counseling for diabetes, cancer, and a host of other diseases, why have it for HIV? By making routine HIV testing a part of routine medical treatment, will have a greater impact on public health than you can imagine. First, there will be more individuals identified early and able to get proper treatment. Two, the social stigma with HIV/AIDS will be removed as people will be able to not fear the test itself any longer. Third, it will improve and simply healthcare expense and productivity, as laboratories and medical professionals can allow the patient to opt out of testing, but will not have to include a great number of additional procedures, paperwork, and time into the process. Allowing for an easier process to get an individual tested for HIV will also open communication between the medical provider and the patient, instead of having to concentrate on the formalities of bureaucracy.

Thank you for your time and attention, I hope that you will support this bill and bring Connecticut in line with the National CDC guidelines. This is not an issue of privacy and protection, but an issue of improving public health overall.

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