

Testimony for SB 189 - An Act Concerning Notice to the Departments of Public Health and Education Regarding the Immunizations of School Children

It is the hope that all children will receive immunizations to prevent the occurrence of vaccine preventable diseases. In my experience as a nurse for the past 37 years and as a school nurse for almost 26 years, I review hundreds of immunization records each school year to monitor compliance with the State's Immunization requirements for school attendance. Although each year I complete an immunization survey to report compliance to the State, I have not even once, seen the state respond to students who do not meet the immunization criteria for school attendance.

Without documented proof of immunization, these children must be considered un- or under- immunized. Attempts to obtain records from parents are exhaustive and not always successful. There is no repercussion for not providing immunization records to schools. Children remain in school despite repeated attempts by school nurses to obtain immunization records from the parent.

A few points to consider include:

- Unimmunized children are at risk for getting vaccine preventable diseases. Otherwise healthy infants and toddlers can be especially vulnerable to getting the disease and the complications associated with those vaccine preventable diseases.
- Complications from these diseases can range from mild, to severe life altering complications, including encephalitis (swelling of the brain which can lead to permanent brain damage), hearing loss, bacterial infections and other complications including death.
- Unimmunized children can spread the disease to other children infecting them with vaccine preventable diseases. This is especially true for babies who are too young to be fully immunized. They simply are not old enough to have received all recommended doses of vaccines.
- Unimmunized children, who attend school where a vaccine preventable disease breaks out, are excluded from school until that last child who has become ill with the disease has recovered. This can result in educational loss for the student.

Without follow up and follow through, un- and under- immunized students will continue to attend school and possibly become ill with these vaccine preventable diseases and spread the diseases to other students. Remember, there are students in schools who for medical or religious reasons cannot be immunized.

There is a concept called "Herd Immunity" wherein if most of the people are immunized against vaccine preventable diseases, those individuals who are not, or cannot be immunized, may receive some protection from these diseases as it is thought that those who are immunized and do not get the diseases will not make other people sick. However, the more un-and under-immunized people in the "herd", the greater the risk of developing the disease and transmitting it to others. We do not live in a vacuum. People are out in all areas of the communities and exposed to a plethora of potential health risks such as colds, influenza and other illnesses including the vaccine preventable diseases.

As Americans, we live in the most powerful country in the world. We take pride in providing good healthcare to our citizens. The provision of vaccine preventable immunizations is one way that we can help to protect the health care of all people who call the United States of America "Home", especially children who are at greatest risk, and cannot, by themselves, make health care decisions, or go to the doctor.

If this bill passes and school nurses are required by law to report un-and under-immunized students to the Public Health and Education Departments, the departments can undertake the follow up with parents to have children receive the lacking immunizations so that all students attending school in Connecticut, receive the required immunizations and have the best chance for living healthy lives including the diminishment or eradication of getting vaccine preventable diseases.

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