

2/21/2013

To the members of the Childrens Committee:

My name is Sarah Emmons and I have been an RN for the past 25 years. Seventeen of those years, I was employed as a nurse for The American Red Cross in their Blood Services division. I resigned my position last March to return to patient centered care.

I am here to voice my opposition to Bill 6331.

After 17 years of overseeing all kinds of blood drives from corporate, community, high schools and colleges, I can honestly say, I do not believe allowing 16 year old adolescent children to donate blood is a safe, responsible thing to do. Maintaining safety at High school blood drives is especially challenging due to the emotional and physical immaturity of many of the seventeen and eighteen year old donors that we currently accept. There are exponentially, more adverse physical reactions by this age group during, after and even before, their blood donations, than blood drives with a more mature donor base. So much so, that The Red Cross, enacted new height/weight restrictions for high school aged donors, about three years ago, in an effort to cut down on the large percentage of these occurrences. And at about the same time, the Red Cross required schools to provide an adult from the school to help oversee the students- a policy that while I was employed there, was not always followed.

There is a lot of peer pressure to donate blood in high schools. Many of these children will go to extreme lengths to be able to donate blood. We conduct a health history interview on each potential blood donor, prior to the actual donation. We use this health history to screen out potentially dangerous health conditions that could be transferred from donor to patient, as well as to protect the donor, should they have a condition that may make it unsafe for them to lose a pint of blood. Often times in the high school population, the peer pressure to donate is so strong, that the student will hide important health information that may disqualify them from the process. I have seen kids slip through the cracks with their misinformation, from heart defects to pregnancies to communicable diseases with unpleasant consequences for these donors and potentially the people who receive their blood. Kids are especially adept at circumnavigating the height/weight restrictions, resulting in many unnecessary adverse donor reactions. Blood safety is only as strong as the honesty of its blood donors.

Many adolescent children do not have the emotional maturity to handle the blood donation process. This lack of maturity often results in anxiety riddled donors, who are much more likely to develop an adverse physical reaction at any time during the blood donation, or even while sitting at the history table. Some of these adverse reactions, include, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, skin pallor, diaphoresis, loss of consciousness, seizures, loss of bowel and bladder control, prolonged recovery, head injury secondary to feeling lightheaded and falling down after the donation is over, nausea, vomiting, hyperventilation leading to tetany, to name a few of the more common ones.

I have seen all these reactions over the years, and I can tell you they happen most often at high school blood drives. And these are 17 and 18 year old donors. Adding 16 year old donors to the mix will only make matters worse. The proposed plan by the Red Cross to enact legislation to allow 16 year old children to donate blood, is not going to benefit these children. At a time when our society is keenly

focused on protecting our youth, I find it very distasteful that the Red Cross is looking to pad their inventory from our children at the expense of their safety, and the safety of the recipients that receive this blood.

A minor is defined as a person under the legal age of full responsibility. A person under a certain age which legally demarcates childhood from adulthood. The age depends upon jurisdiction and application, but is generally 18 years.

Sixteen year old children are minors in our society, incapable of fully understanding the consequences of their actions. As adults we enact laws such as driving restrictions, to provide boundaries to keep our children safe from themselves. Please don't let our children down now. Help continue to protect our youth and our blood supply, oppose Bill 6331.