



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

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House Bill 5733 – An Act Concerning Access To A Child's Death Certificate

The Department of Public Health (DPH) provides the following information with regard to HB 5733.

The bill would allow a certified death certificate of a child to be withheld from a member of the public if such disclosure would cause undue hardship for the family of the child. The proposal does not describe what constitutes an undue hardship or who has the discretion to make such a determination. The proposed bill also does not describe who is exempt from the restriction. The bill would need clarification so that the provision to restrict the release of certain death certificates can be administered fairly and consistently among the State Vital Records Office and the 169 local vital records offices.

Periodically, DPH receives inquiries from grieving relatives expressing concerns about the public's access to their family member's death certificate. Most often, these deaths involved a communicable disease, drug overdose or suicide. Privacy concerns related to public disclosure of death certificates affect many grieving families, regardless of the age of the decedent. A more manageable way to protect the privacy of family members of decedents is to restrict cause and manner of death on ALL death certificates, regardless of the age of the decedent. The death certificate contains sensitive information related to the cause and manner of death, and when applicable, detailed information about how a fatal injury occurred. Currently, information regarding a death caused by a disease such as AIDS or Hepatitis, or a drug overdose, or by means of suicide, or other information that is deemed highly sensitive, is available to any member of the public upon request. The Department recommends that information related to the cause and manner of death, and injury, be available only to family members and others who can demonstrate a legitimate interest. Others would be able to get a death certificate, but with the cause and manner of death information redacted.

We note that Connecticut is one of only a handful of states that allow unrestricted access to death records. Most states restrict public access to the death certificate in its entirety, redact the information pertaining to the cause and manner of death, or provide a Certification of Death which is a separate document that lists only the name of the decedent, and the date and place of death. The Department notes that issuing a Certification of Death in Connecticut would require a local registrar to manually complete the document every time it is requested. Thus, the additional time and labor used to complete these documents will incur costs for both, the State and local registrars.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.

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