

Testimony of
Brenda Cartmel, PhD, in Support of
SB 872 – An Act Concerning the Use of Indoor Tanning Devices by Persons under Eighteen
Years of Age

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and other distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Brenda Cartmel. I am an epidemiologist at the Yale School of Public Health and have worked in the area of skin cancer risk and prevention for much of my 20 year career. Indoor tanning has been clearly shown to be a risk factor for all types of skin cancer,¹⁻² including melanoma the most lethal type of skin cancer. On the basis of this evidence, ultraviolet emitting tanning beds have been classified as Class I carcinogens, the same classification as asbestos and tobacco smoke. In the United States we do not knowingly expose any American to asbestos and do not allow tobacco sales to minors. Therefore, we should do all we can to eliminate the use of tanning beds by those under age 18.

Data from our research at the Yale School of Public Health and Yale Cancer Center show the vast majority of young Connecticut residents indoor tanned at commercial facilities. Therefore, the most effective way to restrict indoor tanning in this age group is by banning indoor tanning for under 18 year olds at commercial facilities. I therefore support Senate Bill 872.

Recent research has been published suggesting that some individuals may develop an addiction to tanning³⁻⁴, similar to alcohol consumption. As the tanning industry has noted, beta endorphin is released when one tan indoors, which may result in one developing an addiction to tanning. One piece of anecdotal evidence supporting this idea is that some people indoor tan much more than is needed to maintain a tan, an example being the “New Jersey Tanning Mom,” who made the news last year. While research on tanning addiction is new and more is being learned each day, the patterns of indoor tanning in young people are particularly relevant and worrisome within this emerging area of research. We know that the earlier the age of onset of drinking alcohol the more likely one is to become addicted⁵. If this holds true for indoor tanning, not only would young people be increasing their risk of skin cancer with early tanning bed use, but they might also go onto to develop an addiction and continue this dangerous exposure at excessive levels.

In my early years I was an oncology nurse and my patients included both young and old individuals. So, I know the pain and disfigurement of surgery which can result from skin cancer treatment, and the distress of undergoing chemotherapy required for advanced melanoma. Therefore, if we can do anything to reduce this experience for young people, we must take action. I believe this bill is extremely important to reduce skin cancer rates in young people and I give it my full support.

References

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