

Thank you to the members of the PH Committee for the opportunity to testify on behalf of bill HB 872 “An Act Concerning the Use of Indoor Tanning Devices by Persons Under 18 Years of Age.” For those of you on the committee who I have not had the opportunity to meet, my name is Avery LaChance. I am an MD/MPH student from UConn who is planning to pursue a career in dermatology. My interest in indoor tanning started by taking an indoor tanning webinar this past summer. The lecture was grasping and sparked my interest to investigate the health risks associated with indoor tanning further. Indoor tanning has been shown to increase the risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, as well as non-melanomatous skin cancers, including basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma, both of which are a significant cause of morbidity and medical expense across the nation. As opposed to a majority of other solid tissue cancers, the incidence of melanoma within the US, is on the rise demonstrating a 150% increase from 1973-2003. There is no doubt that indoor tanning trends are contributing to this increase, especially amongst younger populations. A recent nationwide survey demonstrated that 37% of adolescent females and 11% of adolescent males have used indoor tanning facilities at least once in their lifetime. Another study found that 76% of melanomas diagnosed in 18-29 year olds are attributable to ever use, even one session, of a tanning device. Unfortunately, indoor tanning has also been shown to have addictive properties and this risk is higher for individuals who begin tanning at an earlier age. Because the risk for developing skin cancer is dose dependent, continued tanning compounds an individual’s risk for developing skin cancer. The more I read, the more horrified I became and as I continued to learn, it became quite clear to me that I could not just sit back and do nothing knowing that adolescents in our state still have access to this known carcinogen. I hope you all leave this public hearing feeling similarly.

At this point, there is insurmountable evidence implicating tanning beds in the development of skin cancer; this risk is increased for individuals that start tanning at a young age. Unfortunately, tanning salons and the media have targeted a young and vulnerable population. Adolescents in the US are being raised in an environment in which tanning salons offer “prom tanning packages” and celebrity popstars such as those on MTV’s Jersey Shore promote their infamous life mission of “GTL” or “Gym. Tan. Laundry.” Unfortunately, these messages ignore the significant health risks that indoor tanning presents and the “need” to achieve a bronzed complexion is propagated by peer pressures within high schools across the state. Having graduated from high school not too long ago, I can remember just how strong this pressure can be. Several months prior to prom classmates would start to flock to tanning beds to “develop their base” and group trips to tanning salons post lacrosse practice, were all too common.

It’s time that we change the message that we are passing along to our adolescent population in CT to one that celebrates all skin tones and promotes natural beauty. With SB 872, we are in a position to protect adolescents in our state from developing preventable cancers later in life. Now is the time to act.