

TESTIMONY ON BILL 872 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF INDOOR TANNING DEVICES BY PERSONS UNDER EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and Members of the Public Health Committee:

I wanted to thank you for your dedication to public health and for hearing this important bill concerning legislation of tanning devices for minors. My name is Lauren Hurd and I am from Hamden, Connecticut. I testified in 2011 and 2012 and I tell my story again this year in order to fervently reinforce the need for a complete ban on tanning beds for people under 18.

Tanning is big business. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, almost thirty million people in the U.S. tan every year, 2.3 million being teenagers. I was part of that statistic until four years ago when I was diagnosed with the deadliest form of skin cancer - malignant melanoma. Those are not two words you expect to hear at 22.

I began tanning in high school, at age seventeen. For me, it was a friend saying, "We're all going tanning for prom; come with us!" After brief hesitation, I agreed to go and pretty soon it became a frequent occurrence. The ritual continued long after prom. Throughout college, I tanned regularly with my friends. To say that the effects were gratifying would be an understatement; I was addicted. The psychological effect this drug had on me and continues to have on countless other people creates an undeniable dependence. The sad reality is that I had no concern for the silent damage I was doing to my body. Although I am a smart girl, I chose to ignore warnings and made excuses for it along the way. Due to my lack of concern, lack of education regarding UV exposure and skin cancer, and my tanning addiction, I was diagnosed with cancer.

It is human nature to be interested in immediate results rather than long-term ones. This holds true especially when it comes to adolescents, who often tend to have little regard for their own health. Young people maintain the notion that they are somehow invincible. I discovered the hard way how wrong I was. At that age, the negative repercussions of doing something seemed like some vague possibility that could present itself far in the future. However, I would like to stress the fact that this is an imminent threat to our youth. A deadly cancer that was found primarily in older patients is now being seen in some as young as teenagers.

In my opinion, the issue with minors and tanning is threefold:

1. The mixed information coming from a variety of sources causes confusion about the true health risks. Tanning devices are not classified properly and because of this adults can have a hard time making educated choices, let alone minors (Press Release: Regulate Tanning Beds – Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro). Teenagers will always choose to believe the information that supports what they are doing; I know I did.
2. Minors do not understand what skin cancer means. In fact, some adults I have spoken with do not truly have a concept of the severity of this particular type of cancer. Shockingly, many still don't realize it has the very real potential to kill.
3. The age-old adage that people don't think it will happen to them. But it is happening - to those as young as teens and twenty-somethings. People are dying unnecessarily and younger than they ever did from cigarette smoke.

**TESTIMONY ON BILL 872 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF INDOOR TANNING
DEVICES BY PERSONS UNDER EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE**

The truth remains that children under eighteen are not listening to warnings and do not fully understand the hazardous effects tanning has on their health. What kind of message are we sending that a carcinogen of this nature is legal to them?

Young minds can be easily influenced and need guidance. For this reason, the fact that the bill bans minors from using tanning devices is vital to the protection of their health. If this had been the law when I began using tanning beds, it may very well have prevented me from getting melanoma. With support from all the scientific evidence available, we have the responsibility to save others from making the same mistake.

As members of the Public Health Committee, please strongly consider helping to protect the youth of Connecticut – your children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews – by supporting Bill 872 banning use of indoor tanning beds for those under the age of 18.

Sincerely,

Lauren Hurd
Hamden, CT