

Testimony of
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Committee on Public Health
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SB 1128: To require health care employees who have direct contact with patients or residents to be immunized against influenza.

Good afternoon Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Erin Cummings and I am a Registered Nurse currently working in Critical Care at the William W Backus Hospital in Norwich, CT. Before becoming a nurse 8 years ago, I spent 10 years in research and development at Pfizer Pharmaceuticals. I come to offer testimony in **opposition** to SB 1128, a bill requiring all health care providers to become vaccinated against influenza.

2012 was the first year that flu shots became mandatory at Backus Hospital. I have worked at the same hospital for 8 years, never once receiving a flu shot. Until this past January (two months after receiving the shot), I have never contracted the flu. It was a difficult decision for me to receive the shot as I am very much against it, and I even considered leaving health care altogether. But I truly believe in my contribution to this field, and thus I went against my inner intuition and received the shot. Shortly after being injected, I experienced the frightening sensation of not being able to take a deep breath, and severe heart palpitations resulting in dizziness and vertigo. Thankfully, this passed and did not require any medical intervention. However, I also felt what I can only describe as "brain fog" that lasted for two days as well as near constant nausea for 3-4 days. In so many ways, I have come to regret the decision to be vaccinated, and therefore I would like to provide evidence to support my position such that health care workers may have the freedom to decide for themselves in the future.

First, allow me to explain how deeply I feel that the mandatory nature of the shot is a violation of my civil rights. It is my right, as a human being and a citizen of the United States, to decide what goes into my body. As someone who has dealt with research for all of my adult life, I am perfectly capable of studying the current research and deciding for myself whether a product is safe and effective. The current evidence is not compelling enough to convince me not only that annual flu shots save lives, but are safe for all those receiving them.

Given that I spent many years conducting research, I feel I have an inside view of the nature of research as well as its benefits and drawbacks. Research is our guide in the medical field, but I feel that too many see research as undisputable law. A research study is only as good as its method, statistical analysis, and most importantly the driving force behind the research. In other words, determining who is paying for the research is an important detail in deciding its validity. Bias is a huge problem in any field of research and we must be aware of how it shapes our conclusions. In addition, it is very difficult to normalize data for all the outside influences that may affect the outcome. For this reason, something "proven" today may be "disproven" 10 years from now. Therefore, all research must be read with these factors in mind.

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international, independent, not-for-profit organization which reviews all of the research studies on a given topic and publishes their findings. The majority of their funding comes from the proceeds of the Cochrane Library and other Cochrane products and they do not accept funding from any commercial organizations such as pharmaceutical companies. Therefore they are not influenced by

commercial interests and thus they can provide well-respected guidance to the medical community in a non-biased manner.

In 2010, The Cochrane Collaboration reviewed 50 reports of studies evaluating vaccines for preventing influenza in healthy adults. The results of the review state that “inactivated vaccines have a small effect in preventing symptoms of influenza and getting workers back to work quicker.” In addition, they also state that we found no evidence that vaccines prevent viral transmission or complications.” (Jefferson et al., 2010) During their campaign to get everyone at the hospital vaccinated, Backus hospital went to great lengths to state that vaccination helped keep our patient’s safe by preventing transmission from nurse to patient. The Cochrane Review clearly states that there is no evidence to support this statement. In terms of reactions to the vaccine including Guillian-Barre Syndrome, a condition that can cause progressive paralysis, the review warns of the “danger of commencing a large vaccination campaign without adequate harms assessment.” The most striking statements are made under the header “WARNING” on page 2 of the document. In this statement, the authors warn of the strong bias noted within vaccine research studies in general.

“An earlier systematic review of 274 influenza vaccine studies published up to 2007 found industry funded studies were published in more prestigious journals and cited more than other studies independently from methodological quality and size. Studies funded from public sources were significantly less likely to report conclusions favorable to the vaccines. The review showed that reliable evidence on influenza vaccines is thin but there is evidence of widespread manipulation of conclusions and spurious notoriety of the studies. The content and conclusions of this review should be interpreted in light of this finding.” (Jefferson et al., 2010)

In conclusion, I hope that my statements here today create questions in your mind regarding the mandatory vaccination of all health care workers. It should be a choice made by each individual, especially given that some of our greatest researchers have stated that more intensive research needs to be done in order to make safe recommendations on a large scale vaccination policy. Nurse should have the choice to become vaccinated or wear a mask during flu season. Please vote “no” on this bill as well as consider any future legislation that will protect health care workers from mandatory vaccination.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this very important topic. If I can be of any further assistance, I am at your service.

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References

Jefferson, T., Di Pietrantonj, C., Rivetti, A., Bawazeer, G. A., Al-Ansary, L. A., & Ferroni, E. (2010). Vaccines for preventing influenza in healthy adults. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2010*, Issue 7. Art No.: CD001269. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD001269.pub4