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Subject: Testimony in support of H.B. No. 5147

Dear Connecticut Public Health Committee and other CT Legislators:

I am in support of H.B. No. 5147. I have been a public health educator since 1980 and understand the growing need for cytomegalovirus (CMV) education, for women of childbearing age. I am writing today as a resident of Connecticut; to encourage you to pass H.B. No. 5147. I firmly believe that education and screening will support pregnant women and protect their baby from (CMV), a preventable infectious disease, which causes more disabilities than Down syndrome.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CMV is a major cause of morbidity and occasional mortality in newborn infants, yet there are no education campaigns to warn expectant parents. In recent years, it has become evident that CMV is the most important cause of congenital infection in the developed world, and that it frequently leads to mental retardation and developmental disability. About 40,000 babies are born in the U.S. each year with CMV. 90% of infants infected with CMV at birth (congenital CMV infection) appear healthy at birth. Health problems or disabilities due to congenital CMV infection may appear 2 or more years after birth. While only 20% of infants with congenital CMV develop symptoms or disabilities, all infected children may unknowingly infect others, even if they themselves never have any symptoms. Without preventive measures, exposure to CMV during pregnancy can have tragic consequences.

### **Signs and Symptoms**

#### **Signs of CMV infection that may be present at birth**

- Premature birth
- Liver problems
- Lung problems
- Spleen problems
- Small size at birth
- Small head size
- Seizures

#### **Permanent health problems or disabilities due to congenital CMV infection**

- Hearing loss
- Vision loss
- Mental disability
- Small head size
- Lack of coordination
- Seizures
- Death

The burden carried by new mothers, who unknowingly expose themselves to infected children, only to pass the virus on to their unborn child is tremendous. The suffering for children living with preventable congenital CVM is painful (emotionally, physically, socially and spiritual) impacting the whole family. Far too many children have no hope for a normal childhood, with opportunities and promise.

Historically, CMV education is not part of prenatal counseling, home day care licensure or local public health education programs. It is time for a comprehensive education and media campaign, one that ensures that all people have access to timely and accurate information about CMV. While the CT Dept. of Public Health dedicates a page, buried deep within their website, think of how many at-risk pregnant women never get the information.

With education, women can make informed decisions about their health. They can protect the health of their unborn baby and learn about screening and treatment options available. By passing H.B No. 5147 you will ensure that all people have access to accurate information about CMV, that the high cost of medical care and special educational services are reduced, and that you have created the sustainable policy change needed to protect future generations. Thank you for your consideration.

Cindy Barry