



March 13th, 2014

Joint Committee on Public Health  
Public Health Committee  
Room 3000, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

***Re: SB 257, An Act Concerning Hepatitis C Screening***

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of the Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group, Inc., which was founded to address a lack of supportive services for people living with Hepatitis C, I write in strong support SB 257, “An Act Concerning Hepatitis C Screening.” This bill would require primary care providers to offer screening for the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) to individuals who were born between the years of 1945 and 1965, the so-called “Baby Boomer” cohort, consistent with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

HCV is a contagious liver disease that can lead to lifelong illness and can progress to life-threatening conditions, including cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver transplantation. Since 2007, HCV has eclipsed HIV as a major cause of mortality in Americans. The CDC reports HCV accounts for more than 50% of new cases of chronic liver disease and affects between 3 – 4 million people in the United States. The CDC predicts that deaths due to HCV will double or triple in the next 15 to 20 years.

HCV is a silent killer, usually with no symptoms; and, thus presents a grave threat to public health. The vast majority of people with HCV (45-85%), do not know they are infected, and are at a greatly increased risk of advanced liver diseases, such as cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver transplantation – which are very expensive to treat. The CDC is now recommending a one-time HCV test of everyone born between 1945 and 1965. According to the CDC, if all Baby Boomers were tested, over 800,000 additional HCV cases would be identified, and up to 121,000 deaths could be avoided. In addition, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issued a B grade recommendation in June of 2013 for testing of people at high risk for HCV and a **one-time screening for HCV infection for adults born between 1945 and 1965**. The USPSTF B recommendation will ensure that HCV testing for these populations will be reimbursed by third party payers. Further, on March 1, 2014, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released a Proposed Decision Memo outlining its intention to cover a one-time Hepatitis C testing for all in the program for everyone born between 1945 and 1965. A

final ruling is expected in June. This important trend among federal policymakers should ensure that HCV testing is paid for by most third party payers

The timing of this bill is ripe. There have also been significant HCV treatment advances in the past several years, with more expected to come on the market soon. Unlike older HCV regimens, the new treatments have excellent tolerability profiles (fewer side effects), and have a 90 to 100% cure rate in most people with HCV. The increased testing that will result from enacting this legislation will ensure that individuals are made aware of their HCV status, have access to new treatments and cures, and take proactive steps to prevent further transmission. Also critical, it will result in significant savings to the Connecticut healthcare system by avoiding the exorbitant costs associated with treating preventable advanced liver disease.

New York was the first state to pass a comparable law last Fall. Many other states are now considering similar legislation, and many more will soon see bills introduced when their legislative sessions convene. SB 257 would ensure that Connecticut is a national leader around codifying federal guidelines around requiring Hepatitis C screening for Baby Boomers.

The Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group respectfully urges this Committee to pass SB 257, which is essential to the health and well-being of the people of Connecticut as well as the Connecticut treasury.

The thousands of Connecticut residents who do not know they are infected with the HCV virus are relying on your leadership.

Respectfully,

Ronni Marks-Founder/Executive Director

**HCMMSG**

The Hepatitis C Mentor & Support Group, Inc.

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