



March 13, 2014

The Honorable Terry Gerratana
Co-Chair, 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 - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Gerratana:

On behalf of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable, a coalition of public, private and voluntary organizations dedicated to reducing the incidence of infection, morbidity and mortality from viral hepatitis in the United States, 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 most third party payers. Further, on March 4, 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.

There has 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 National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable 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. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (415) 235-8593 or rclary@nvhr.org

Sincerely,



Ryan Clary
Executive Director