Chairs and Members of the Committee on Children

I am writing in support of Raised Bill No. 207, AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR A LYME DISEASE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM. I believe the Connecticut Department of Health (DPH) should be awarded $450,000 to implement and sustain a statewide Lyme disease prevention effort combining mass media marketing and community-based education based on the BLAST Lyme prevention model.

Selecting an existing evidence-based program is both efficient and cost effective. The BLAST Program has built name recognition as well as valuable private, corporate and public health partnerships over the past six years. Its recommendations are ones all Connecticut citizens will benefit from. Supporting regional BLAST educators with advertising, public relations and social media marketing is an excellent strategy to reinforce the key prevention points especially during peak infection months.

BLAST stands for the five most important measures that people can take to prevent tick-borne diseases by reducing tick bites.

- B stands for bathing soon after spending time outdoors,
- L reminds people to look their bodies over for ticks and to remove them properly,
- A encourages people to apply repellents appropriately when outdoors,
- S stands for spraying the perimeter of yards at the most effective time of the year,
- T reminds people to treat pets.

This request for funding comes at a time when citizens are increasingly concerned that forty years after the illness was discovered in our state, Connecticut continues to have one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the country. The problem is even more serious now that we know the same tick species that transmits the agent that causes Lyme also transmits anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis and babesiosis to people. Research has shown, if employed sufficiently, personal protection measures, and environmental tick-control measures around the home can reduce the number of cases.

As a science teacher in Ct. I have witnessed first hand just how devastating this disease can be to my students and their families. Each year we have a few students who are absent for an extended period of time due to this illness. It is of the utmost importance that we address this disease and do all that we can to eradicate the disease.

While Lyme disease is generally a mild illness when diagnosed and treated quickly, the disease may cause serious or chronic illness involving multiple body systems, and this underscores the importance of using prevention measures. People at the highest risk for tick-transmitted diseases, including Lyme disease, are children under 10 and adults over 55 years of age.

A commitment of state funds is needed to implement and sustain a statewide prevention program focused on raising awareness of tick-borne disease prevention in 2015.

Sincerely,

Carol Festa

8th grade science teacher - Middlebrook School, Wilton, Ct.