



WESTERN CONNECTICUT
HEALTH NETWORK

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To whom it may concern:

As the Chair of the Department of Medical Education and Research and the Principal Investigator for the Western Connecticut Health Network Lyme Disease Registry, I would like to express my enthusiastic support for ***S.B. NO. 207 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR A LYME DISEASE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM.***

As the rates of Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, and babesiosis continue to rise in Connecticut, it is increasingly evident that we need a coordinated statewide effort to prevent these diseases. I wish to support this Connecticut Department of Public Health effort, as this is the first bill of its kind, introduced to fund community-based prevention statewide. Community-based education is an important step in the effort to reduce the incidence of tick-borne diseases in Connecticut.

The long-standing BLAST program, run out of the Ridgefield Health Department, offers a successful model for the implementation of a larger-scope program across the state. The BLAST program has offered invaluable, evidence-based advice about tick-borne disease prevention to the Greater Danbury community since 2008. Furthermore, since the inception of the WCHN Lyme Disease Registry in 2010, the BLAST program has been integral to the success of our study. We have further had the opportunity to include the BLAST message in our work, as well as the pleasure of collaborating with the BLAST program on several tick-borne disease prevention projects, health fair appearances, and community presentations.

In addition to serving our immediate community, the BLAST program has received innumerable requests to conduct presentations across Connecticut and in the neighboring states of New York and New Jersey. These requests are not only testament to the outstanding work of the BLAST program, but also to the need for more widespread community education and the community's desire to learn. As demand for tick-borne disease prevention education continues to increase with the rising incidence of disease, the BLAST program cannot support the overwhelming need. It is therefore necessary to replicate the BLAST program in each of the five DEMHS Regions to more easily manage requests for appearances at community events and health fairs as well as media interviews.

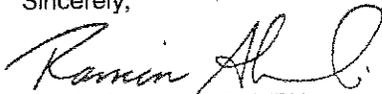
The BLAST program was originally funded by a grant through the Connecticut Department of Public Health seven years ago. The BLAST leadership team has demonstrated a sustained commitment to the cause of tick-borne disease prevention, as well as the ability to run a community-based prevention program effectively and on a limited budget. Together, the Connecticut Department of Public Health and the BLAST program have a complete toolbox of prevention materials that will enable a coordinated and efficient launch for this

new endeavor. Furthermore, lessons learned by the BLAST program staff can be disseminated amongst other educators to help ensure economical use of time and materials.

Over the past several months my staff conducted a multi-faceted study about tick-borne disease prevention practices and perceived barriers among residents, healthcare providers, and public health officials in the Greater Danbury area (results not yet published). One of the most consistently identified barriers to public education about tick-borne disease prevention was lack of funding tied specifically to this objective. Whereas Directors of Health reported previously receiving \$20,000 or more per town for community health education and prevention activities each year, money that is now only granted to those districts with a total population of 50,000 or more, they are now forced to rely on volunteer services, in-kind support, and partnerships with local institutions to offer educational and preventive services to their residents. This results in haphazard, inconsistent efforts and reportedly leaves public health officials unable to disseminate the prevention message as widely as they would like. Passing this bill as written will allocate funding to point people across the state for consistency both in effort across time as well as in message content.

I am excited by the prospect of a state-wide tick-borne disease prevention program, supported by the Connecticut Department of Public Health and the long-standing BLAST tick-borne disease prevention program, and I again offer my strong endorsement for S.B. no. 207. If I may be of any other assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ramin Ahmadi".

Ramin Ahmadi, MD, MPH

Chair, Department of Medical Education and Research
Danbury Hospital