

Testimony
Public Health Committee
Proposed House Bill#5525 An Act Concerning Cytomegalovirus
Friday, February 20,2015

To the Chairs, Senator Gerratana and Representative Ritter, distinguished vice-chairs, Senator Crisco and Representative Riley, ranking members, Senator Markley and Representative Srinivasan, and committee members:

My name is Brenda Kinsella Balch and I have been a Pediatrician in Connecticut for 25 years and the Connecticut Chapter Champion for the American Academy of Pediatrics Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program for 10 years. I am here in support of HB#5525: AN ACT CONCERNING CYTOMEGALOVIRUS

Cytomegalovirus, or CMV, is a common virus that infects people of all ages. Most of us will have been infected with CMV by the time we are middle-aged, but the majority of us will have no signs or symptoms of the virus. Pregnant women who contract CMV during their pregnancy, however, can pass the virus to their unborn baby and this may result in hearing loss, vision loss, poor brain growth, developmental disabilities, seizures and even death. Congenital Cytomegalovirus (cCMV) is the leading infectious cause of developmental disabilities and hearing loss in children. According to the CDC, 1 in 150 babies are born with CMV each year in the United States. Studies suggest that less than 20% of women know about CMV or how to prevent contracting this virus during pregnancy. Cytomegalovirus is spread by close contact with persons who have the virus in their urine, saliva and other bodily fluids. Good hygiene minimizes the transmission of this virus to pregnant women.

House Bill #5525 has three important components to it:

First, the bill would require the Commissioner of Public Health to establish a public education program concerning CMV. This program would provide information regarding the diagnosis and prevention of CMV to pregnant women and those who may become pregnant, Child Care Programs, Health Care Facilities, School Nurses and Health Educators. Studies confirm that when pregnant women adopt preventive good hygiene behaviors, especially when they are interacting with toddlers, it minimizes the transmission of CMV. Some of these simple preventive behaviors are good hand washing, not sharing food, drink or utensils, and avoiding kissing children on the mouth.

Secondly, the HB#5525 directs the Department of Public Health and Connecticut Hospitals to test for CMV when a newborn fails the newborn hearing screen. The CMV test is a simple, inexpensive and reliable saliva or urine test that is covered by Insurance and Medicaid.

Finally, HB#5525 would require that the Department of Public Health provide information and treatment options to parents of newborns affected by CMV.

It is vital that Connecticut passes HB#5525 so that we can educate and therefore prevent the devastating impact cytomegalovirus has on our infants and families in Connecticut. This bill

will not only lead to prevention of CMV in our state, but ultimately the treatment and cure of CMV for future generations.

Sincerely,

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