

## IN SUPPORT OF HB 6949 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDHOOD VACCINATIONS

My name is Sandra Carbonari. I have been a primary care pediatrician practicing in Waterbury for over 32 years and am also the president of the CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Pediatricians applaud and appreciate your longstanding, crucial work on improving the health of the children of Connecticut.

As you know, recent outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases have generated much discussion about immunizations. Currently, of the children entering kindergarten and 7<sup>th</sup> grade in Connecticut public and private schools, 218 have a medical exemption and 1028 have a religious waiver. This is a 15-fold increase from 2000 in religious waivers while the number of medical waivers has remained virtually constant. This translates to an exponential increase in the exposure of vulnerable individuals to vaccine preventable diseases.

We certainly respect the right of parents to make decisions about their children's health care; however, they do not have the right to put vulnerable children and adults at risk. This is a critical matter of public health. Requiring adequate immunization of children in our schools has been proven to be an incredibly effective intervention preventing many diseases. Viral illnesses such as whooping cough, polio, measles, diphtheria, tetanus, mumps, rubella, and varicella, once contracted, have no effective treatment. The best we can offer is symptomatic and supportive care and hope the unprotected child's immune system can fight the disease. Even bacterial illnesses for which we have antibiotic treatment can cause severe illness and death. Early in my career, before the existence of the immunization for Hemophilus influenza type B, it was not uncommon to have otherwise healthy patients become ill with meningitis and epiglottitis caused by this strain of bacteria. Meningitis is an infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and epiglottitis causes the swelling of a structure in the throat that can result in the inability of air to pass through to the lungs. I will never forget one night when I was on call at Waterbury Hospital and I saw 6 children in the emergency room with fever and difficulty breathing. All 6 needed to go to the OR to be intubated (have a tube placed into their trachea to allow them to breathe) and then to the ICU for IV antibiotic treatment and supportive care for several days. And these were the lucky ones. Those who did not get treatment in time did not survive. Since the introduction of the Hemophilus influenza type B vaccine, I have not seen one case of the disease in an immunized child.

I have cared for patients whose immune systems do not function properly. This can be caused by conditions they were born with, treatment for cancer, treatment after kidney or heart transplant, or infectious diseases. We have so much success treating these children and helping them to lead normal lives. Going to school should not expose them to a preventable life threatening risk.

*We believe that the only exemption to immunization for a child attending school should be medical necessity.* This is critical to maintain the crucial level of immunization for what is known as herd immunity. Herd immunity protects the vulnerable of our population-infants too young to be immunized and children and adults with medical conditions affecting their ability to be immunized or adequately fight disease. As a mother, caregiver of elderly parents, and a leader of pediatricians in Connecticut, I commend your willingness to take on this issue and urge you to allow medical necessity as the only reason for waiver of the requirement for full immunization of a child attending