

Committee on PUBLIC HEALTH

H.B. No. 6949 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDHOOD VACCINATIONS AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDHOOD VACCINATIONS.

Gabriella True  
West Hartford, CT  
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Senator Terry Gerratana, Representative Matt Ritter and members of Public Health Committee. My name is Gabriella True, parent and Connecticut resident, I am opposed to HB 6949 because it violates my First Amendment right to free exercise of my religious beliefs. Parents should not be required to sign an incriminating statement in order to claim their legal right to a religious exemption. Please vote against this bill. To be clear Connecticut allows for religious exemption. Connecticut should not create substantive requirements for a parent/guardians to exercise their religious beliefs when taking religious exemption to vaccination.

This bill would require a doctor to provide vaccine education to parents who claim religious exemption. Nothing a doctor says will change one's religious beliefs; doctors have nothing to do with religious beliefs. This bill asks people to accept a secular argument for a religious exemption.

In addition to the education requirement, parents will not only be forced to sign and notarize a statement that they have reviewed and understand the educational materials presented to them but also that they understand that they are putting their child and others at risk. This declaration is extremely incriminatory and could put them at risk investigation by the state. In addition, parents might not hold this declaration to be true, as per their religious beliefs; therefore signing it undermines their religious beliefs. However if one does not sign the statement, as would be required by Bill 6949, one can not claim religious exemption. This firmly infringes the First Amendment right of freedom to religion.

I would like to review why this Bill was proposed. Connecticut has a 98.53% vaccination rate; one of the highest rates in the country regardless that there has been an increase in the rate of religious exemptions. There are bills introduced in 15 states, with varying success, including Oregon, Washington, Pennsylvania, California and others seeking to further reduce vaccine exemptions. This demonstrates a concerted effort on a national scale to restrict vaccine exemption either by infringing on religious rights or by fully eliminating all but medical exemptions. Clearly this is move to restrict rights is not an issue solely about Connecticut. It is my understanding that the state must show a compelling interest when infringing upon my individual liberties. With an over 95% vaccination rate in the state of Connecticut (3), I do not believe that the state of Connecticut has a compelling reason to override a religious exemption to vaccines.

There are over 60 vaccinations from birth to 18 on the schedule. This number has increased exponentially over the past 10 years. Yet at the same time exemption rights has decreased. I am firmly opposed to HB 6949.