

6949

Senator Terry Gerratana, Representative Matt Ritter and members of Public Health Committee. My name is Kate Gorman, I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice, at a pediatrician's office. I am writing testimony against HB 6949.

We live in the United States of America, and this proposed bill plain and simply violates the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. In the state of CT we do not have to defend our religious beliefs. The practice of religion predates the implementation of vaccination by millenniums, so I'm not even sure on what grounds this bill is being drawn, is government saying they have a right to interpret what a specific religion's stance is on vaccination, because they don't, it's unconstitutional.

I oppose this proposed bill because it violates parents and guardians' First Amendment rights to free exercise of their religious beliefs. Parents should not be required to sign an incriminating statement in order to claim their legal right to a religious exemption. There is the added layer that they are being asked to sign and notarize a document saying that they understand the medical risks as dictated by the Department of Health. What does their understanding of the perceived risk information have to do with their religious beliefs?

The questions also arise as to what purpose the notarized statement may be used in the future and whether it will be used against parents during legal proceedings with DCF, custody battles and other unforeseen situations. What will be done with these notarized statements? Who will have access to them? Will they be public? What is the real purpose behind this proposed bill?

We have freedom of religion in this country and the freedom of choice as to how we practice our religion. If we start chipping away selectively at that freedom of choice for the perceived "greater good" of society, are we not inching towards a more communist way of thinking when it suits us?

This is a violation of the Connecticut Constitution where section 20 states: "No person shall be denied the equal protection of the law nor be subjected to **segregation or discrimination** in the exercise or enjoyment of his civil or political rights because of religion, race, color, ancestry or national origin."

This bill supports withholding a child's access to education if parents do not comply. Forcing a citizen to notarize a document that states they understand they are putting their child and others at risk due to their religious beliefs, **constitutes religious persecution**. Doctors have no say in our religious beliefs.

I am pro-choice and I am pro-democracy, and I urge you to do the right thing and I urge you to vote against this bill.

Thank you for your time, consideration and service,

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Kate Gorman, LCSW

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