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TESTIMONY - STATE BIOSIMILAR SUBSTITUTION

Connecticut General Assembly General Law Committee

General Law Committee consideration of SB 313

Speaker:

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Disclosure:

I have no disclosures to make regarding my travel here today. The Global Healthy Living Foundation accepts grants and charitable contributions from pharmaceutical companies, government, private foundations and individuals. We have received scientific briefings from pharmaceutical companies, as well as from our independent medical advisory board.

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and committee members.

My name is Shantana Hazell. I'm a patient advocate and member of the Global Healthy Living Foundation's 50 State Network. I want to thank you for allowing me to speak today. I live in Bridgeport, CT, and I am the founder Sister Girl, an organization that empowers women that have endometriosis and gynecologic cancers. While I usually share the voices of thousands of others, today I am here to share my own in support of the passage of SB 313. My legislators are Representative Andre Baker and Senator Edwin Gomes.

In 2006 I was in the prime of my life and suddenly started experiencing inflammation, swelling, and pain in my knees, ankles, feet, and hands. I was finally diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Surprisingly, I felt relieved to hear this diagnosis. Finally, I had an answer for why my body was acting this way. I could finally get the right treatment and start to heal.

I take medications known as biologics, which I self inject into my skin. I have endometriosis, fibromyalgia, hypothyroidism, and osteoarthritis along with my RA. Multiple comorbidities make it critical that the different components of my treatment team – like my rheumatologist all know what medications I am on. Anytime my therapies are altered, my doctors all want and need to be updated. It's critical to my health and wellbeing that I have a transparent trusting relationship with my doctors. SB 313 ensures that will happen.

Biologics have revolutionized care for patients like me, and in my case, are the only kind of drug that make me well enough to walk and function. Before I started taking a biologic, I was so unwell that I could not walk. My joints were so swollen that I couldn't straighten them out. Without a biologic, my quality of life suffered. My personal relationships were strained, my professional relationships were



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suffocated. In short, I had trouble with simple, everyday tasks: brushing my hair, driving, typing on my laptop—activities that we take for granted became excruciating for me.

Biologics have given me my life back. I can walk, and most importantly, I can do what I love most - supporting and empowering women through my non-profit Sister Girl.

However, it has not been an easy road to get here. I have tried three biologics with varied outcomes. With some, my body has reacted very poorly—I broke out in rashes with one. Others have worked very well for a period of time and then abruptly stopped.

Autoimmune diseases like mine are very difficult to treat, and a medication's success depends on the way it interacts with each individual's biology. The biologic that I'm currently stable on could work for me but it may not work for the patient my doctor sees right after me, even though we both have RA.

Because I'm on a biologic, my blood is tested every other month. I have to check my body constantly to make sure I don't have signs of a poor reaction. If I get a fever I have to immediately see a doctor. All of these might be signs that I'm having an adverse reaction to my biologic.

When I start a new biologic, I have to be patient. I have to wait sometimes up to 6 months to figure out whether it works.

I'm excited about the advent of biosimilars—medications that may provide patients like me who are running out of biologics to turn to, with new options, which, over time, may prove more cost-effective than the original biologics. However, I have to tell you that right now they make me a little uneasy. Without laws in place to require communication to occur between my pharmacist and physician, I'm afraid the medication I rely on can be substituted without my entire treatment team knowing. I won't feel comfortable taking a biosimilar until I know there are laws in place that ensure transparency.

What will happen if my insurance company decides to drop coverage for the biologic I have been taking for years because it is suddenly the more expensive option? With a cheaper mimic available, my insurance company may now require me to take that first. I'm scared that I'll be switched to a medication without the opportunity to discuss its potential side effects with my doctor. Or even worse, I could be switched to a biosimilar without even knowing that I was switched. That's why I'm here to endorse SB 313 and prevent that scenario from happening. SB 313 is a straightforward approach to doctor and patient notification.

Managing my disease is a very difficult task. I have fought long and hard for the successes I've achieved. I'm committed to being a proactive, diligent patient—but I can only stay healthy if my treatment team and I am informed about what I'm taking, and what it does to my body. As a patient I don't want to give that up. And as compassionate legislators, you can't let that happen.





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GHLF and I urge the members of this Committee to support SB 313. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my remarks and I would be pleased to provide any further information that you may require. Thank you for your time and attention.

