

February 16, 2016

To: Public Health Committee of the CT General Assembly

From: Neal Lustig, MPH, Director of Health, Pomperaug Health District, Southbury

Re: HB #5129

Members of Public Health Committee – As a long time serving local Director of Health in the State of CT, I request that the members of the Committee consider long and hard the implications of adding one more provider of childhood vaccines in the State of CT. At present we have Private Pediatricians, Community Health Centers, School Based Health Centers, Visiting Nurse Agencies, School Nurses, Family Practice Physicians, Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioners, and Local Health Departments all providing influenza vaccine to children in a variety of settings. As Co Chair of the CT Immunization Coalition, formerly the CT Flu and Pneumonia Coalition, I observed the impact in 2010, of pharmacists entering into the administration of seasonal flu vaccine to adults, 18 and over. Many of the Visiting Nurse Agencies and Local Health Departments that had previously served the adult population, along with private physicians, experienced a large shift in the delivery of seasonal flu vaccine at that time. The Visiting Nurse agencies, Local Health Departments and even Private Practice Physicians, experienced a dramatic loss of patients served, while the pharmacies, entering this new field of medical practice gained. While one might say that's "competition", that's the shifting health care "situation", the impact on the delivery of "prevention services" in Ct should be considered. Many of those public health nurses whether working for a VNA or a Health Department were no longer needed as the distribution of seasonal flu vaccine providers changed. Those public health professionals were no longer available to work in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, i.e. Blood Pressure Control or Diabetes Prevention/Education work. Most importantly, and one concern that the Public Health Committee should not forget, is that those entities were experienced and trained in the delivery of mass vaccinations. That ability is now partially lost in CT, and the process of getting ready for the next pandemic-flu outbreak (H1N1), the next Ebola Epidemic, the next Zika Virus, CT will be severely strained. I urge the Committee to consider this impact and be advised that the State Dept of Health has little capacity to actually provide direct service employees in the next H1N1 Pandemic Flu event, and must rely on these mass immunizers, among others, to protect the public.

Just one more note of caution here in regards to seasonal flu vaccination. Vaccinating children takes a particular skill level and we actually have specialized training in administering to young children, who sometimes are not very compliant. Administering a vaccine in a busy pharmacy, with patients and customers walking about, to a squirming three or six year old should be part of the consideration by the Committee. It is sometimes a very difficult practice and must be completed carefully with skill.

My Health District administers flu vaccine to children of all ages and accepts all insurances available including Ct Medicaid and Medicare. We are part of the 800 provider CT Vaccine Program administered by the State Dept of Health, which provides free flu vaccine to uninsured and Medicaid recipients, along with all children under 59 months who have private insurance. We post our prices if applicable and what insurances we accept. It remains unclear if CT Pharmacies will do the same if approved to provide seasonal flu vaccine to children.