

**Testimony of Stephen R. Smith, M.D., M.P.H. Before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee on HB 5384, An Act Concerning Prescription Drug Costs  
March 6, 2018**

My name is Stephen Smith. I reside at 899 Montauk Avenue in New London and I am a family physician practicing at the Community Health Center in New London. I also serve on the board of directors of the Connecticut Health Advancement and Research Trust (CHART), the parent organization of the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut and serve as president of the board of directors of the Eastern Area Health Education Center (AHEC). I am professor emeritus of family medicine of the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

Today, I speak on behalf of the physicians of the National Physicians Alliance (NPA) in Connecticut who have voted to endorse all of the recommendations of the Healthcare Cabinet to restrain the costs of prescription drugs. I applaud the committee for bringing attention to this important issue through HB 5384, An Act Concerning Prescription Drug Costs. Everyday in my practice, I see patients struggling under the weight of unconscionable and indefensible drug prices. A middle-age patient of mine from East Lyme had his leg amputated when he couldn't afford to pay for his insulin. He has given me permission to use pictures of his stump when I talk about high prescription drug prices. Insulin was discovered by Dr. Banting in 1923, who sold his patents to the University of Toronto for one dollar so that those suffering from diabetes might benefit from his discovery. Today, patients must pay hundreds of dollars a month for this life-saving drug that was discovered almost 100 years ago.

I have another patient who suffers recurrent drenching sweats and debilitating abdominal pain from Familial Mediterranean Fever. The drug that completely controls these symptoms is colchicine, a medication that was known to the ancient Egyptians and Greeks and which Benjamin Franklin took for his gout. Colchicine cost only pennies when I used it as a high school student for a science experiment on rabbits. Now, thanks to URL Pharma's unscrupulous actions, this valuable generic drug costs \$5 a pill. Nothing justifies a 500% increase in its price.

HB 5384 proposes to increase transparency in the way pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) report rebates and require more information on prescription drug costs. This is all well and good, but will have negligible effect on drug costs. The bill would request justification of price increases of more than 25% from manufacturers. If manufacturers provide any information at all, which is dubious without some stiff penalty for withholding it, you know that what you get will be useless generalities.

This toothless bill is just what Big Pharma wants to allow it to pretend that something has been done to rein in drug costs when, in fact, nothing has been done to help the people of Connecticut. The committee needs to amend this bill to include the Healthcare Cabinet's top recommendation to establish a Drug Review Board to

investigate potential pricing abuses and to refer cases of price gouging to the Attorney General. Your constituents and my patients deserve no less.