

**Ageing Committee Public Hearing**

**February 19, 2019**

**Testimony of Christine Belvin**

**In Support of**

**H.B. No. 7101 "AN ACT CONCERNING FLU SHOTS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS PRIOR TO  
HOSPITAL DISCHARGE"**

Co-Chairs Maroney, Serra and Ranking Members Kelly and Wilson. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Christine Belvin and I'm here to testify in favor of HB 7101 *"An Act Concerning Flu Shots for Senior Citizens Prior to Hospital Discharge."*

I've served as a volunteer member of the Board of Directors for Farmington Services for the Elderly, which provides programs and services to senior citizens in Farmington in need of assistance.

HB 7101 would simply ensure that each hospital between October 1<sup>st</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup> of the following year shall offer to all patients 65 years and older a flu shot prior to their discharge. The legislation makes clear that hospitals would **NOT** be required to give the shot, simply to offer one to the senior citizen upon their discharge from the hospital.

The goal of the legislation is to help increase the flu shot coverage and offerings for senior citizens, if they haven't already received it, when they are discharged from a hospital. This is a simple way to ensure awareness and coverage with a particularly at-risk population. Similar legislation was passed last year in Rhode Island.

I'm here today to speak in support of this bill and would like to highlight 4 areas that the legislation will help address in improving the health of senior citizens in Connecticut:

1. **Seniors and their caregivers are at higher risk for flu:** Seniors are vulnerable to flu because their immune systems are weaker due to age and made worse by chronic illness. A flu shot for seniors protects them against serious illness and complications.
2. **Flu is a serious health risk for seniors:** For seniors, the flu can quickly develop into a severe illness and may cause death. In fact, 70%-85% of flu-related deaths and 54%-70% of flu-related hospitalizations happen in people who are age 65 and older.
3. **Getting the flu shot reduces flu risk and severity:** Research shows that if someone is vaccinated gets the flu, it will be a milder case. People 65 and older are at high risk of serious flu complications and account for the majority of flu hospitalizations and deaths each year. But seniors who got the flu shot reduced their risk of being hospitalized due to flu by 50%.
4. **The flu shot is free under Medicare for CT Hospitals:** If an senior has Medicare, the flu shot is free as long as the provider accepts Medicare. There is no co-insurance or co-payment needed.

The flu is a serious illness, especially for older adults. People 65 years and older are at high risk of serious flu-related complications as their immune systems become weaker with age.

It's estimated that between about 70% and 85% of seasonal flu-related deaths in the United States have occurred among people 65 years and older.

Older adults and people with chronic diseases are more likely to have problems from the flu. It often leads to a hospital stay, and sometimes it can be

fatal. For seasonal flu-related hospitalizations, people 65 and older account for between about 50% and 70% of the estimated total admitted.

The CDC strongly recommends that anyone in the high-risk groups, like the elderly, receive their flu shot. Information, knowledge and legislation like this - especially for the elderly - can be powerful tools to help seniors fight influenza and help to keep them healthy.

The flu is a very serious disease for senior citizens potentially resulting in return hospitalization and even death. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends an annual flu vaccine for everyone 6 months and older to prevent flu illnesses, doctor visits, hospitalizations and the risk of flu-related deaths in senior citizens.

It's important to note that the flu vaccine truly does save lives. Getting the flu vaccine not only protects senior citizens themselves but also those around them and in the community.

The 2017-2018 season was particularly brutal and responsible for the deaths of approximately 80,000 people across the U.S., according to the CDC. Last year in Connecticut, over 150 people died because of the flu. Already this year, we have had 1,425 hospitalizations and 15 flu related senior citizen deaths in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 7101. I ask for your support of this legislation and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.