

To: Representative Liz Linehan,
Co-Chair Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams,
Co-Chair Representative Robin E. Comey,
Vice Chair Senator Marilyn V. Moore,
Vice Chair Representative Robin Green,
Ranking Member Senator Kevin C. Kelly, Ranking Member

From: Art Calef, Lebanon, CT

RE: Opposition to HB-7005: An Act Prohibiting the Acknowledgment of Parental Statements Concerning Religious Objections to Vaccination by School Nurses and Permitting Members of the Clergy to Acknowledge Such Statements.

Members of the Children's Committee,

I strongly urge you to oppose House Bill 7005. This bill has been disguised as a simple clerical change to an existing procedure (the endorsement of a religious exemption form filed by a student's guardian with a school). However, closer examination reveals some very concerning issues:

Striking the school nurse from the religious exemption is not logical or necessary and can reasonably lead to harassment. The school nurse is the person who keeps the form on file and should be the only person to whom guardians are required to disclose their child's medical status. The school nurse is also the ONLY person on the current list of signatories that is bound to privacy by HIPAA. Having to take the form to a stranger in a public setting encroaches on the privacy of both the guardian and the child.

Removing the school nurse from the list of signers also adds an additional step of bureaucracy to the process of exempting a child from vaccinations, if the guardian chooses to do so. Most guardians would simply bring the exemption form to the school nurse for her signature and to be filed (by her). Removing her as a legal signatory forces guardians to go elsewhere for a signature, and then to return back to the same school nurse to file the form. Our lives as parents are usually busy enough without adding unnecessary steps to accomplish administrative tasks.

Adding a clergy member as signatory for a religious exemption form is also a bad idea. There is already confusion about the role of the signer, whose job is merely to acknowledge that the person submitting the form is the child's guardian. The nurse is more than capable of doing this. Adding a clergy member to the list will tend to generate confusion about the purpose of the signer. One would automatically assume a clergy member asked to sign a religious exemption form is being asked to first evaluate the actual religious beliefs and motives of the parents and certify that they are sincere and that the religious organization to which they belong interprets

their tenets in a way that allows religious exemptions in the first place. This is not their job. Nor is it something many of them would be willing to do. One's exact religious beliefs are a very personal matter, and most clergy acknowledge and respect that. Moreover, many of them would be highly averse to insert themselves into a discussion on their organization's stance on vaccinations.

This bill is clearly designed to foster legislative creep. The American Academy of Pediatrics has clearly stated in a statement to its members that they believe the religious exemption should be eliminated completely and it is clear that this bill is a first step toward accomplishing that. This is a shady way to accomplish one's political aims and does not serve to promote the credibility of the CT legislature. The bill should be shot down in its entirety.

This bill as written is a "fix" for a problem that does not exist. And it is likely just the first step on a slippery slope of infringing on the rights of a parent or guardian in the area of vaccination choice. As a parent myself, I will fight vigorously for my right to make educated decisions about what medical procedures will or will not be performed on my children. **I urge you in the strongest manner to join me in fighting for the rights of our children and parents. Please kill House Bill 7005.**

Thank you all for your service to the people of the State of Connecticut.

Art Calef