

HEALTH CHOICE

C O N N E C T I C U T

PROTECT YOUR RIGHT TO A HEALTHY LIFE

February 7, 2019

Dear Committee Members,

It has come to my attention that HB 7005 has been raised in your committee: **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.**

I have several deep concerns with this legislation:

1) This proposed legislative change is unnecessary, unwarranted and completely inappropriate.

While many people using exemptions in CT don't necessarily use the school nurse option, many families do prefer this option to limit exposure of their sensitive and private health information. I understand that there may have been confusion in the past with school nurses not having clarity that they are solely acknowledging a parents signature, and not agreeing or disagreeing with their decision to use an exemption. Nurses are free to decline, but again, if it's clear that they are acknowledging that the signor is who s/he says s/he is, there really shouldn't be an issue.

The nurse option was added to protect unnecessary exposure of student's health information and to make the new law less inconvenient, since this acknowledgement law was added in 2015 for no reason other than to harass people using the religious exemption. No issues were ever brought up regarding parents misrepresenting themselves to compel this acknowledgment in the first place.

2) The intent on the addition of clergy is questionable, confusing, and is making parents very uncomfortable.

Parents have certainly not been asking for this additional option. While adding more options sounds benign, adding religious leaders to acknowledge a parent's signature on a religious exemption could be confused with requiring their agreement, which is unconstitutional.

There is also deep concern regarding legislative creep and/or the potential to use this bill as a vehicle to further restrict the religious exemption. Since 2015, there has been an orchestrated lobbying effort across the country to restrict and remove non-medical exemptions, with little regard to religious, constitutional or human rights.

3) Bills aimed at restricting the religious exemption are unwarranted harassment. CT has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country, and there is absolutely no reason to harass the small number of people in the state who believe in their souls that they are doing what's best for their children.

Like pekuach nefesh in Judaism, most organized religions hold preservation of life above every other law, so when people learn of the actual ingredients, the mounting scientific issues and their own children's reactions, the lines between science and religion evaporate.

4) The right to freely opt out of any medical product or procedure must always be preserved!

With loss of vaccine product liability in 1986, the only barrier left between industry and children are their parents. The subsequent tripling of our recommended schedule leaves many scientifically unanswered questions. When organizations like the AAP are calling for removal of informed consent to vaccines, it is evident that much larger systemic issues are at play.

5) Whether one is part of an organized religion or not is irrelevant.

Please note that recent court decisions have upheld the rights of individuals seeking exemptions from immunizations based upon personal and religious reasons. U.S. Supreme Court case *Frazer v. Illinois Dept. of Security*, 489 U.S. 829, found that a state may NOT deny an exemption simply because a person is not a member of a formal religious organization.

This is a very complicated topic, and I hope you will take the time to explore the myriad of issues more deeply before attempting to legislate away people's rights. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at all. This legislation is completely inappropriate, and I hope you will vote to oppose and kill it.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Dr. Elissa Diamond-Fields
Director of advocacy
Health Choice CT