

February 7th, 2019

Dear members of the Committee on Children,

I am writing to urge you to OPPOSE HB 7005. This bill is clearly a pretext to remove the right for the small minority of Connecticut families to decline vaccination due to their sincere, religious beliefs so that their children can receive a public education, which is a constitutionally protected right in our state.

I oppose this bill as written for the reasons other parents have written about regarding the need to maintain medical privacy for our children by utilizing the school nurse, and that a clergyperson is unnecessary and discriminatory against those who have faiths that may not have organized clergy or a brick and mortar place of worship. Most importantly, the person acknowledging the exemption is simply verifying the person's identity, not attesting to the veracity of their religious beliefs!

Some additional points I hope you will consider are that every child has a right to a free public education as guaranteed by Article Eighth of the CT Constitution. Please do not deny children an education because of their religious beliefs.

By further restricting the religious exemption or outlawing it completely, the state will violate federal education laws for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities have strong protections to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

Lastly, any restriction or removal of this exemption unjustly targets working and low-income families that do not have the ability to leave the workforce and homeschool their children. This burden falls heavily on women who already face many challenges in the workforce while mothering their young children.

When considering the religious freedom of approximately 1200 children in this state and trying to balance the need for public safety, please do not forget Connecticut has one of the highest vaccination rates in the entire country, over 98% for school-aged children. Non-medical exemptions were outlawed in California after a measles outbreak at Disneyland. That outbreak did not occur in a public school and most of the cases were adults. There is no evidence that revoking religious exemptions will stop measles outbreaks. Not everyone who receives the vaccine will develop an antibody response and there will still be large segments of the adult population that are unvaccinated. It is discriminatory to target children and hold their right to a public education hostage.

Sincerely,

Kristen A. Festa
Bristol, CT