

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Jessica, I'm a mother of two young children here in Connecticut and I am writing to share my OPPOSITION to HB7005: AN ACT PROHIBITING THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PARENTAL STATEMENTS CONCERNING RELIGIOUS OBJECTIONS TO VACCINATION BY SCHOOL NURSES AND PERMITTING MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY TO ACKNOWLEDGE SUCH STATEMENTS.

It is important to me that my children learn not to discriminate for any reason, are aware of and fully exercise their rights as citizens, and have access to any and all opportunities available for the furthering of their educations, careers, and lifelong dreams. It is also my responsibility to shield my children from and fight against anyone and anything looking to hinder their ability to fully experience the wonders of Freedom and Liberty.

As part of these goals, I make it a point not to share medical information with anyone other than medical personnel and those responsible for their health in my absence. Removing school nurses from the religious exemption form would force me to share private, privileged information with persons who have no business having access. The exemption is the only form required for school and daycare that must be signed by anyone other than a parent or physician and makes a school nurse the logical and convenient signer for most of us. Forcing parents to go out of their way to have someone, anyone, acknowledge their identity for any school form is clearly discriminatory against those who choose to exercise their right to practice their faith by claiming the exemption.

The addition of clergy to the list of accepted signers is also discriminatory. By definition, clergy are "ordained for religious duties, particularly in the Christian Church." Certainly not all families in the state are Christian, not all religions have clergy, and it is wrong to include someone on the accepted list that not every family may have access to.

Furthermore, upon review of the AAP's submitted testimony and various social media posts and conversations with our legislators over the last several years, it is clear this bill is merely the first step in a coordinated attempt to remove the exemption altogether. Take away the nurse, add the clergy, and it is a short jump to requiring a signature from a religious figurehead to somehow prove the parent is a "true believer," something that is not only impossible but is clearly against the entire concept of Separation of Church and State, a cornerstone of our country's establishment.

It has been upheld that actions taken under strongly held personal beliefs based in religious creed are protected under Freedom of Religion. Disallowing this exemption would be a clear violation of our Constitution and the very values our country was founded upon.

If there is concern that families are abusing the Religious Exemption in an attempt to work around the lack of an available Philosophical Exemption, then perhaps it is time to reinstate the

Philosophical exemption. Children who are not vaccinated under any exemption are no different than children not vaccinated under a different exemption. To eliminate any of them is discrimination and unconstitutional.

In addition, the removal of the Religious Exemption or making it exceedingly difficult to obtain would further violate the right of my (and all) children to education choice. Families like mine would be forced to remove our children from school and will also limit access to extracurricular activities, secondary education, and more.

In conclusion, there is no benefit to the State or its citizens to alter the Religious Exemption in any way. Those of us practicing both our rights as parents and as Religious Practitioners are well within the coverage and protections of the Constitution and do not support this blatant religious discrimination.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica G
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