

Esteemed Children's Committee members,

It has come to my attention that there exists proposed legislation to change the current Religious Exemption as it stands.

As a concerned resident and spiritual person, I am asking you to please oppose 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.

This is an inappropriate bill for many reasons.

1. The removal of a school nurse from the list of persons that may acknowledge a signature leaves parents no choice but to share their children's medical information with multiple individuals. The school nurse is already privy to this information, so it makes sense to continue to have the school nurse acknowledge the signatures in order to protect children's medical information if parents deem that necessary. The person putting forward this bill, Liz Linehan, claims that school nurses feel that by signing the form they are going against their own beliefs as medical practitioners. This is not the case: acknowledging that a signature belongs to the person signing a form does not mean that you agree with what is on the form. They should be made aware of this if it actually poses an issue.
2. Adding clergy to the list of individuals that may sign the exemption simply does not make sense. What ever happened to separation of church and state? Authorizing clergy to acknowledge a form seems in clear contradiction with this principle. What is the actual purpose of adding clergy to the list of people who can acknowledge the form? Some people I have spoken to believe this is a form of "legislative creep" and that the next step would be to REQUIRE a signature from a clergyman or woman in order to qualify for a Religious Exemption. Not only should one not need to PROVE their religious beliefs to anyone or have them validated by anyone (religious beliefs are personal), not all religious people belong to an organized religion, and not all religions have clergy. This is religious discrimination. Some believe that this bill could eventually lead to the elimination of the Religious Exemption. This would be wrong on so many levels, including religious discrimination and elimination of religious freedoms, and denial of children to the right of a free, public education (which goes against current state policy).
3. There are only a small number of families using the Religious Exemption. Why the need to change anything? My research tells me that CT has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country. Obviously the policies already in place are working. There is no reason to further restrict the ability of people to provide their children with an education. I believe that it is already sufficient that people need to have these forms acknowledged by a person outside of their family, there is no need to make it any more inconvenient for these families by eliminating the most convenient choice for acknowledging the form, the school nurse.

I hope that you will see that this seemingly innocuous bill could be disastrous for all. Little by little our rights are being stripped from us daily and this is yet again another assault on those rights. Let's maintain the integrity of this great state by ensuring that its citizens are guaranteed

the right to exercise their religious freedoms, instead of discriminating against them or making them jump over hurdles simply because of their religious beliefs.

Sincerely,  
Bitsy K.