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Senator Mary Abrams, Representative Liz Linehan and members of the Committee on Children

This testimony is submitted in favor of:

H.B. No. 7005 (RAISED) 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. (KID)

Hello. My name is Lori Flaherty. I am a Registered Nurse and the School Nurse Supervisor for the West Hartford Non-Public Schools. I have been a school nurse for over 14 years.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 7005 that would remove the school nurse from witnessing a religious exemption form for parents opposing vaccinations

As a school nurse, the position includes multiple and overlapping roles to promote health, safety and academic learning in the school environment. Many times this includes providing education to parents on vaccine preventable diseases and on the public health concept of herd immunity to protect the population as a whole.

Although the option to claim religious exemption from vaccination relies solely on the parent, the option for the school nurse to sign and witness the parents' signature may imply the nurse is validating the statement that vaccinations are contrary to the parent's religious practices. Many times nurses are asked to sign the exemption form for students who have already received vaccinations before and/or after submitting the exemption form.

The option for a school nurse signature creates a dilemma for the nurse as to their professional responsibility to promote a healthy school environment to all children but especially to the immunocompromised population who medically cannot receive vaccinations. By allowing the school nurse to witness and sign the exemption may actually hamper the opportunity for the primary care provider to educate the parent on vaccine preventable diseases and address any concerns at the time of the visit.

I urge you to support the school nurse's professional responsibility to advocate for a healthy school environment for all children by removing the nurse's signature and replace it with language from the bill:

“(G) 28 [notwithstanding any provision of chapter 6, a school nurse] an 29 ordained, commissioned or licensed member of the clergy;”

Respectfully submitted, **Lori Kaylor Flaherty, RN BSN**