

Members of the Children's Committee,

I am writing you in regards to HB 7005: 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.

The religious exemption (RE) to vaccination for school aged children has been in place for many years in Connecticut. This exemption supports religious freedom for CT families whose religious beliefs are in conflict with receiving vaccinations. The religious exemption is a form that a parent completes, signs, and submits directly to his or her child's school nurse. The exemption form lists six individuals who may sign to acknowledge the exemption. (Please note: the signature on the exemption form is not permission or approval of the exemption, it is simply acknowledgement.) The school nurse is currently one of the persons who may sign to acknowledge the exemption form. The school nurse is THE most easily accessible and appropriate person to acknowledge this exemption form, as the exemption is then directly submitted to the school nurse. It also provides for student privacy, as the form does not need to be viewed by a party outside of the school. This current procedure works perfectly well for both parents and schools and places very little undue burden on parents who are worshiping and practicing their religious beliefs. In short, it is not a broken process and does not require amending or fixing.

HB 7005 proposes REMOVING the school nurse as one of the individuals who may acknowledge the religious exemption. I ask you to question why this is being proposed. I ask you to consider what effect it would have on parents. There is no compelling or demonstrated need to remove a school nurse from the religious exemption. Furthermore, a parent seeking a signature from one of the other individuals listed (town clerk, attorney, notary, etc.) would have face the burden of additional travel to visit one of these individuals, as well as potential cost in terms of fees from a notary or attorney. This places an undue burden on parents who are simply practicing their religious beliefs.

HB 7005 also proposes adding a clergy member as an individual who can acknowledge the religious exemption. This is truly an inappropriate suggestion for an exemption form that, in many cases, is used for children attending public school.

Further, I would like to address the testimony on this bill that has been submitted by American Academy of Pediatrics. While the AAP may offer opinion on medical matters, they certainly should not advise on those that are religious. Even more egregious is their statement indicating that they recommend removing all religious exemptions, effectively advocating the removal of a religious right in Connecticut. We look to members of the Connecticut General Assembly to uphold and preserve our right to religious freedoms in this state.

Again, the current religious exemption has worked and continues to work in a functional, efficient, and logical fashion for the small percentage of CT families who utilize it. There is no compelling need to spend legislative time in amending this process, nor is there any compelling need to restrict access to a school nurse and thereby place an undue burden upon families who are simply practicing their religious beliefs.

Please oppose and vote no on HB 7005 and leave Connecticut's current religious exemption intact.

Thank you,

Marie Krupa

South Windsor, CT