

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

This testimony is submitted in OPPOSITION 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition of HB 7005.

I believe that when considering each proposed bill, each legislator is tasked with questioning what is the intention of the bill? What is the problem that it is intended to solve? And further, does the bill actually solve the problem in the most efficient and effective way?

In my view, this bill does not solve any problem-- and unfortunately, whether intentionally or inadvertently, creates new problems.

In recent years, an additional hurdle was created for parents who wish to exercise their religious freedoms regarding the health care decision of vaccinations, when a requirement that the religious exemption form be *acknowledged* by a person from a list which includes a Judge, a Family Support Magistrate, a Clerk or Deputy Clerk, a Town Clerk, Notary Public, Justice of the Peace, Commissioner of the Superior Court, or a School Nurse. Previously the parent was required to submit a Religious Exemption Statement without needing someone to acknowledge it. It is my understanding that parents who wished to exercise their religious freedoms opposed this additional paperwork burden, but the law was passed anyway.

Most of the professionals listed in this relatively new requirement are not someone that a parent would typically interact with on a day to day basis-- getting a document signed by many of them requires an appointment or a special trip to a government facility or courthouse. The single characteristic that separates a school nurse from all the others is the convenience of access for a parent, who during the course of their typical day, is already going to be at the school and interacting with the school nurse in order to submit the form.

My observation is that some school nurses either do not understand that acknowledgement of the form is distinctly different from sharing the religious views of the family submitting the form, or in some cases nurses seem to be under pressure from a supervisor or organization not to sign the forms for political or ideological purposes. If this is true, then the single best solution is to **clarify** to those nurses that the form simply acknowledges the person submitting the form is "known to me (or satisfactorily proven) to be the person whose name he or she subscribed to the within instrument and acknowledged that he or she executed the same for the purposes therein contained." It does not indicate that the nurse agrees with the religious views, shares the religious views, or approves of the religious views held by the person submitting the form.

However, adding a clergy member to the list, would create an implication that the person acknowledging the bill does in fact have authority in approving, sharing, or agreeing with the submitter's religious views. Inherently, the relationship between document submitter and clergy is one of religious nature. Involving Clergy in this paperwork brings a layer of scrutiny into a person's individual religious beliefs and perceptions, which is in my view, a crossing of a line of separation between church and state. Many people's religious views do not fit into organized religion meaning there is no clergy of that viewpoint. The

freedom of religion inherently cannot be limited by the government's specifications about which religious views are acceptable.

Either removing the school nurses from the form and/or adding a clergy member, in effect would make it more difficult for residents of our state to exercise their religious freedoms. Is this the true intention of the bill? If a person is an ideological advocate of vaccines, perhaps they might attempt to justify their desired ends to the means of restriction of religious freedoms? Based on reported accounts of constituents with their legislators, it does appear this is a possibility: that there may be a multi-step plan involving gradual erosion of the religious freedom with intention of an eventual removal of the religious exemption in its entirety. Whether these accounts are accurate or not, the impact of the bill as written supports the concern of parents who want to protect their rights, because if passed into law, this bill would indeed infringe upon freedom of religion.

I believe that given the history of our nation and of our great State of Connecticut, founded on principles of religious freedom by persons fleeing religious persecution, this would be a dangerous path to embark upon and therefore it is extremely important to consider, what problem this bill is actually trying to resolve and whether it is not, indeed, creating a bigger problem rather than resolving any. I believe that this bill creates problems, does not solve any problems, and may potentially open the State to liabilities under federal law, and therefore I respectfully urge you to vote against this bill.

Thank you.

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