

Joint Committee on Children H.B. 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.

February 6, 2019

Representative Lenehan, Representative Elliot, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stephanie Ostrander and I am submitting testimony in opposition to Raised
HB 7005.

As a registered nurse, I am daily entrusted to advocate for, educate, and help to ensure the privacy and autonomy of my patients regarding their healthcare choices. In my ten years' experience as a nurse, I have not always agreed with my patients' choices, but I would not presume to deny them those choices nor to use my position to coerce them to make choices consistent with "what I would do." Without being in their shoes...having all of their life experiences, values, religious beliefs, family systems, past medical history, hopes and dreams, and "anecdotal" stories of those they know who have experienced things that influence their decisions...I cannot even begin to imagine "what I would do" in their medical decisions. I believe it is arrogant, insensitive, cruel, and dictatorial for anyone to take that right and make that choice for them. Someone who, in fact, will not have to live with the effects of that choice on a daily basis.

The Patients' Bill of Rights is a section of the Connecticut state statutes (Sec. 17a-540 et seq.) that establishes specific rights for persons with mental health conditions. I do not think it would be a stretch to apply these rights to ANY patient as we are all equal. Quoting from the Connecticut Legal Rights Project brochure concerning these rights: "The law specifically requires that every patient receive humane and dignified treatment AT ALL TIMES, with full respect for his or her personal dignity and right to privacy. Staff and providers do not have the right to order people around, treat them like they are "second class citizens" or use coercion to limit choice or self-determination. For example, an individual cannot be forced to take medication in order to keep his or her housing."

Adding another requirement to the current practice of religious exemption is, in fact, violating the rights of parents and their children by attempting to "use coercion to limit [their] choice or self-determination." No one should be forced to take ANY substance...whether "medication" or "vaccination" in order to "keep their housing" (as this brochure poses) nor to attend school (as parents fear if they do not vaccinate their child) nor to retain their employment (as many job sites are also considering "requiring" flu shots and similar invasive procedures).

Returning to the same pamphlet explaining the Patient's Bill of Rights, it states: "CAN A PATIENT BE FORCED TO TAKE MEDICATIONS? In general, a person has the right to refuse medications. In fact, no medical or surgical procedures may be performed without the individual's informed, voluntary, written consent. This means that the medications or procedures must be **fully explained** and **all questions answered**, and that **no pressure or punishment** is applied to the individual to influence the

decision. A hospital can medicate a person without consent if there is an emergency” [which concerns life, death, or imminent harm].

As healthcare providers, it is our obligation to provide accurate, truthful, well-researched information to our patients (and/or their representatives which, for children, is their parents) for them to make their own informed decision as to their own and their child's medical care. It is then our responsibility to advocate for their right to make that decision and to assist in protecting that right as well as to protect their health information which includes their decisions concerning their plan of care.

As a school nurse, it is your role to update student records. One's signature to a form to acknowledge receiving that form and its indication concerning a parent's choice regarding vaccination is only that...an acknowledgement for the purpose of accurate record keeping. It is not an agreement with their decision or in any way a reflection on your beliefs or practices as a nurse. Failure to grant this signature, however, would violate your role as a nurse as it is similar to abandonment...a failure to fulfill your given role in this position on behalf of your patient.

I have read numerous testimonies from other members of the state that this bill is actually being proposed to put the religious exemption up for discussion with the end goal to eliminate the exemption altogether. There are concerns that this bill is pushing for mandatory vaccinations for all and the removal of parental rights concerning this medical matter altogether. I shudder at these thoughts as it would imply a day where politicians (or any powers that be) can determine what medication or substance that I, as nurse, can inject into someone's body AGAINST THEIR WILL. Some testimony that I read mentioned yellow stars and a regime that did unspeakable “experiments” on “patients” against their will...please say that these are merely misplaced fears and that this bill is just an ill conceived plan to address a problem that really doesn't exist. Please say that this bill is not part of some shady plan to extend government reach over parents' rights.

Today, I dare to believe that you, our state representatives, are not being as deceitful as that. I dare to believe that there are those who, being elected, still believe that they are to represent the people not to rule the people. I dare to believe that we are not so far removed from our Founding Fathers and their vision for a country where ALL are free from governmental tyranny.

I dare to believe that you will hear the voice of the people today and that you will dare to stand beside them and vote down this bill and any bill that would remove ANYONE'S right to make informed decisions about their own body and health care.