

Greetings,

I am writing to urge you to 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.

What is being proposed is unnecessary. A school nurse is just one of a list of people who are able to acknowledge the current religious exemption (RE) form. Some families are concerned about their children's private health information being made public. The nurse would ALREADY be privy to this information. While nurses are free to decline, all they are doing is acknowledging that the signor is who they say they are. They do not have to agree with or condone the exemption. If nurses have a problem with signing, they do not understand the law. This brings me to the need to address the public testimony of Donna Kosiorowski, RN. As an RN myself I feel the need to address several untruths in this testimony. She states that the role of a school nurse includes education about vaccines and vaccine preventable diseases. This responsibility lies with the child's healthcare providers NOT a school nurse in my opinion. Donna also shows her ignorance when it comes to her interpretation of the current law. By acknowledging a religious exemption, a nurse is attesting to the fact that the parent is who they say they are. Nothing more. She is entirely presumptuous in stating that "many, if not all parents, have no religious objection; they simply do not want to have their child receive vaccines. The requirement for a nurse to witness such a document places the nurse in a challenging situation knowing the parent is misrepresenting the truth. The nurse, as a result, is signing a falsified document." To call all parents who are exempting their children based on their deeply held convictions within their faith liars is insulting and inappropriate. She could not possibly know this information, nor what religion or faith the family practices. The notion that she does is ludicrous.

As a City Representative myself, I understand the legislative process and this bill is concerning as it can be used to weaken and eventually remove the religious exemption entirely by adding clergy to the list of people that can acknowledge the form. The assumption behind this bill, and that of Donna Kosiorowski is that all religious beliefs are expressible through a mainstream, organized church, which is simply not so. Millions of Americans practice their faith and exercise their religious beliefs and are not a member of an organized religion. This privilege is protected by the first Amendment of the Constitution and was upheld in The United States Supreme Court (*Frazee vs, Illinois Department of Employment Security, 1989*) which has already ruled that no established religious doctrine is needed in order for a person to be allowed the free exercise of their religious beliefs. I would also like to address the disturbing testimony of the AAP in favor of removing the religious exemption entirely. Certain legislators have made it known that this is their goal as well. Connecticut law states that every child over the age of 5 has the right to a free and public education. If legislators are to take the recommendation from the testimony of the AAP and seek to remove the RE in its entirety, that would be a violation of the first amendment and would be discriminatory. There is nothing wrong with the current religious exemption as it stands. There is NO PROBLEM TO SOLVE by changing the exemption. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert Roqueta, RN
City Representative for Stamford, CT 4th district.