

February 7, 2019

Dear Members of the Children's Committee,

I strongly encourage you to **OPPOSE** HB 7005 as many of you identify in your platforms that you believe in the separation of church and state, and this proposed legislation is aimed at restricting religious freedom in CT.

This proposition that would prohibit a school nurse from acknowledging a religious exemption is unjustifiable. While I believe when this was implemented in 2015 there was some confusion as to a nurses role in signing the form, a nurse is simply acknowledging the identity of the person signing the form. They are NOT attesting to the parent/guardian's religious creed or in any way affirming their choice. This option **can** and **should** be used to protect a student's health information. Unfortunately, some nurses have misunderstood their role and taken it upon themselves to judge the validity of a person's religious exemption. Not only is it not their place, but they are a medical provider and should follow the outline of the law acknowledging a parents identity and not questioning their religious belief. That is discrimination.

This proposal made by Liz Linehan on the grounds that nurses in Cheshire do not want to sign the form is completely unsubstantiated. I uphold a strong relationship with many nurses in Cheshire who maintain that simply acknowledging a persons identity on a piece of paper is of no inconvenience. Under law, they are listed as a option for acknowledgment and if they need clarification in their role as such, those measures to educate them should be put into place moving forward.

The addition of clergy in this proposed legislation as an option is discriminatory. A person's religious creed is not up for discussion or validation by a member of the clergy and is protected by law. CGS-Section 46a-64 – Prohibition against discrimination and segregation in places of public accommodation on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, marital status, age, lawful source of income, mental retardation, mental disability, or physical disability. This insidious addition is not aimed at simply acknowledging ones identity but affirming the validity of a person's religious creed. Essentially, this would be giving the clergy the power to validate a person's religious creed and is a violation of a child's confidential medical record as it is upheld by HIPAA. Furthermore, there is no requirement for a person's religious creed to be associated with an organized religion.

It is deeply concerning that this bill is dangerously trending towards the further restriction of the religious exemption. Any bills proposed to further restrict the religious exemption are unwarranted and unconstitutional. They violate religious freedom upheld by the First Amendment and deny access to public education for tax paying citizens. The vaccination rate in Connecticut is well above that of the national average and the number of families claiming a religious exemption is miniscule. Any change to the current law is unjustifiable. In 2018, the Connecticut Department of Public Health state immunization program implemented a new vaccine registry that the American Academy of Pediatrics claims is a powerful tool in raising immunization rates. This new registry can assist in determining when vaccinations are due, sending vaccination reminder/recall messages, identifying populations at high risk for vaccine- preventable diseases and targeting interventions and resources efficiently. They have put these measures into place that they believe to be effective, have one of the highest rates of vaccination in the country, yet still are pursuing to change this law knowingly violating the right which

allows the free exercise of religion without fear of government interception.

Respectfully, I ask.... My Body, My Choice; My Child's Body, Your Choice?

In my humble opinion, the question remains, why does it appear that there is legislative creep in looking to violate the First Amendment and limit the free exercise of a persons religious creed in a state that the CDC lists as having one of the highest vaccination rates in the country? Please oppose this bill upholding the First Amendment and maintaining the separation between church and state.

Thank you for your careful consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christina Ruddy