

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing this testimony regarding Subject: 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.

I am sincerely requesting that you take a few minutes to read the following and truly consider my concerns about this proposed legislation because what is being proposed is discriminatory, unnecessary, and unwarranted.

While the school nurse may not be the most utilized option for acknowledgement of the current religious exemption, many families prefer to utilize this option to limit exposure of their sensitive and private health information. As with HIPAA, each individual's health information is a personal and private matter. The school nurse is ALREADY privy to a student's health information and when they are asked to acknowledge the religious exemption form they are simply acknowledging that the signor is who they say they are so there should be absolutely no issue with them being an option to sign.

What is far more upsetting and even more inappropriate is the proposed addition of a clergy member as someone who can acknowledge a religious exemption. This would appear to be an attempt to turn the simple acknowledgement of a parent's signature into a type of agreement on the clergy's part that the objection is in line with the recommendations of the clergy or established religious doctrine.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that everyone in the United States has the right to practice his or her own religion, or no religion at all.

Our country's founders, who were of many different religious backgrounds themselves, knew the best way to protect religious liberty was to keep the government out of religion. So, as you Committee Members should know, they created the First Amendment to guarantee the separation of church and state.

Many people practice a variety of religious beliefs privately, without direction of clergy. This is an individual's religious right and it is nobody else's business. In addition, the U.S. Supreme Court already decided in *Frazee v Illinois Dept. of Security* that no established religious doctrine is needed in order for a person to be allowed the free exercise of their religious beliefs. The acknowledgement in and of itself is a violation of privacy of children's health information, and the addition of clergy is a violation of privacy in regards to religious beliefs and practices..

We have lawmakers assembling in Connecticut that have made it clear both verbally and in writing to their constituents that they intend to have the religious exemption from vaccination removed from Connecticut law. Our very small communities of people religiously opposed to vaccination are under attack by threat of removing the right from our children of an education that we all pay for with our tax dollars. This is DISCRIMINATION. This is UNAMERICAN and completely unacceptable. Connecticut has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country. This legislation, and others being proposed this session, feel like nothing but a witch hunt.

Please do the right thing and OPPOSE this bill which is a clear pathway to religious discrimination against families in Connecticut.

Thank you,

Dr. Risa Sloves