

Madam Chairs and members of the Children's Committee, thank you for taking the time to read my testimony so that you may understand my strong opposition to raised bill HB-7005.

I have several concerns regarding this bill which I will share with you, but first I feel compelled to ask why is this bill being proposed? Has there been a problem with nurses not wanting to sign the "acknowledgement"? If so, why do they have an issue with it? Could some simple education resolve the issue? Have constituents requested that religious leaders be added to the list of those able to provide an acknowledging signature or is there a reason you feel this is necessary? Those were questions I had regarding the proposed bill as I reviewed it and now I'd like to explain my reasons for opposing it:

- 1) The requirement for acknowledgement by anyone, other than someone covered by HIPAA regulations, exposes our children's health information to people outside of the HIPAA regulatory system and therefore is an invasion of their privacy. This would make the school nurse the logical individual to sign an acknowledgment.
- 2) The acknowledgement requirement itself discriminates against people filing a religious exemption because it requires an "acknowledgement" of a document that has been signed and submitted by a parent, and this is not mandated by our legislators on other types of documentation such as early dismissal notes, authorizations to give medication, sports permission slips, field trip permission slips, etc. This makes the requirement appear to be singling out individuals with religious convictions related to vaccinations.
- 3) An additional concern is legislative creep. It is commonly known by those using the Religious Exemption in Connecticut, that a number of legislators have been vocal in their desire to remove the Religious Exemption entirely. It also appears that the addition of a religious leader as an acceptable acknowledger may be with the intent of changing this from an acknowledgement to an approval at a later time. This would be a violation of our religious freedoms. My religious beliefs are mine alone and currently do not and should not require approval by any religious leader.
- 4) And finally, I am concerned that if this bill leaves committee and goes to the floor for a vote, any of those legislators desiring to remove our religious exemption could easily submit an amendment to this bill stating just that, putting our First Amendment rights at risk while denying us the opportunity to engage on this issue. It would be unconscionable to deprive your constituents of the ability to exercise their religious freedoms when there is no credible reason to do so.

Thank you for considering my reasons for opposing this bill. I respectfully request that you vote "No" on HB-7005.

Respectfully submitted,
Maria Smith, Canterbury, CT