

February 7, 2019

Madam Chairs and Esteemed Members of the Children's Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Raised Bill HB 7005. This bill attempts to remove the school nurse from the list of people that is allowed by the state to acknowledge a parent's right to a religious exemption for vaccines. It will also attempt to add clergy to the list that is allowed to acknowledge the exemption. Please oppose this bill and any attempt at changing our current statute in regard to religious exemptions to vaccines.

Quite honestly, there is no compelling interest for the state to make these changes to our current statute. There has been no increase in religious exemptions, there are no current health outbreaks and CT has one of the highest vaccine uptakes in the country at 98.7%. We currently have 1255 children using a religious exemption and there is no need to make this exemption harder to obtain or make changes to it in anyway.

Representative Linehan has said that school nurses have come to her and have told her that they are uncomfortable acknowledging these documents. Representative Linehan and the nurses don't understand that their signature on an exemption is simply acknowledging that they know the person that is signing the form or letter. It is not an endorsement that they believe or don't believe that vaccines are against a parent's religious belief system. In fact, religious beliefs are no one's business and are a private matter. Nurses are fundamental in accepting school physical forms, keeping them on record for their districts, and for knowing the children in that building. It makes complete sense that they not only sign the document but that they are also aware of the exemption as the keepers of all things medical in a public school. They are also well versed in the HIPAA and FERPA laws that surround students in their schools. The nurses are well within their rights to decline to sign, but in essence, all they would be doing is declaring that they don't know the parent.

Representative Linehan made it very clear in 2017 that she wanted to amend a bill at that time and add clergy to it. She has maintained that parents are using the religious exemption as a philosophical exemption and are being dishonest. The law is very clear that this exemption is a religious

belief and as such, a religious belief as it's defined and not necessarily associated, with an organized church or doctrine. There are certainly organized religions that are against vaccines. While I can't speak to 1255 exemptions in our state and to what God or entity that they pray, it is not my business or the business of the state to take data on the religious beliefs of its tax payers. This is legislative creep at best and certainly an infringement on religious freedoms and privacy at worst. When Representative Linehan contributed to a legislative biography for the website Vote Smart, to the category Religion, she replied: "Prefer not to answer, I believe in separation of Church and State." I agree Representative Linehan and I also, prefer not to answer and wholeheartedly believe in the separation of Church and State. Please fix the many other things in our state that you are so passionate about and cease declaring war on 1255 individual children. Based on your history it truly looks like a witch hunt and from one strong mother to another, we have bigger fish to fry in our great state.

I thank you for your time in hearing this testimony and again **strongly urge you to not move this bill to a committee vote.**

Sincerely,

~Melissa Sullivan