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Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the committee, thank you for having me today. I am here before you to testify in favor of House Bill 6540 – An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV.

Over the last few decades our state has done a sufficient job bringing HIV under control, but I worry that we have been slipping over the last few years. Although the overall trend of HIV cases has been on the decline, there are still hundreds of Connecticut residents every year who suffer from this virus.

It is time that we take the necessary and logical steps to drastically decrease, and hopefully eradicate this continuing epidemic. Furthermore, because HIV disproportionately inflicts LGBTQ people and people of color, the hoops that young people have to jump through in order to access PrEP, the drug that could save their life, is discriminatory against those who contract the virus.

Even more troubling is the fact that youth ages 13-24 comprised 22% of all new HIV infections in the United States. The stigma that still surrounds HIV has made it very difficult for young people to come forward and receive the treatment that they need. This stigma causes young people to hide their concerns from their doctor, a decision which could have life threatening consequences.

On top of that, a young gay person may not yet be ready to come out to their parents or their doctor. They might be deterred from telling these adults about their health concerns if they are not ready to come out or uncomfortable with what these adults might think.

The California Supreme Court has noted that there is a very real risk that young people will postpone or avoid medical care if that process is uncomfortable to them. This effect is absolutely horrifying. Why should we make it any harder than it already is for a young person to receive the treatment that they desperately need? Currently, youth access to the life-saving drug “PrEP” is limited because of the requirement for parental approval. We must amend the state statutes in order help the young people who struggle to seek the treatment that they need. These restrictions are unnecessary and destructive. I encourage the members of the committee to do more research on this issue and do the right thing for those kids out there who are scared and need our help.