

To the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Patrick Comerford and I am submitting testimony in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*. I am a lifelong resident of CT currently living in New Haven. I have spent the last decade working on LGBTQ+ advocacy and justice and have been a trainer and facilitator around issues impacting the queer community throughout that time.

H. B. 6540 would increase access to preventive and prophylactic interventions for minors who are at risk of exposure to HIV. Currently, youth who are at substantial risk of HIV infection cannot consent to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a prescription-based daily medication for the prevention of HIV. When taken daily, the pill reduces the risk of HIV infection by up to 92%. Instead, current statutes only allow youth to consent to treatment *after* an HIV diagnosis, doing nothing to reduce the risk of initial infection.

I came out in my life as queer at the age of 11 in 1992. That same year there were 335,000 AIDS cases diagnosed in the U.S. and over 198,000 people died, most of whom were gay men just like me.<sup>1</sup> There was no reliable treatment and there certainly was no pill that could help to prevent infection. Stigma, homophobia, and a lack of information meant I quietly assumed that it was not a question of *if* I would contract HIV, it was a question of *when*. I stopped planning for a future because it was so uncertain. I didn't bother to strive academically and only finished my undergraduate education a year ago at the age of 37. As a teenager in the mid 1990's, I understood AIDS as a death sentence and couldn't see the point of bothering to plan for a future that wasn't mine to have.

Today there is a pill, there is a future, and there is a way to give young people the agency they deserve to control their health and their lives. Youth ages 13–24 accounted for more than 1 in 5 new HIV diagnoses in 2015 and 52% of young men who have sex with men (MSM) have undiagnosed HIV.<sup>2</sup> The reality is that while things have changed in some ways, many young people who would most benefit from PrEP are unable to access it because of often well founded fear of parental rejection. Parental consent simply isn't an option available to them. Allowing youth to consent would foster trusting relationships between young people and adult providers by opening new avenues for *preventative* care.

I strongly support H.B. 6540 and I urge you to vote favorably for this important bill. No young person should have to wait until after contracting HIV to access care. Your support will protect the health and safety of Connecticut's children. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Patrick Comerford  
New Haven, CT

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<sup>1</sup> AIDS Survival Project, <http://www.thebody.com/content/art32382.html>

<sup>2</sup> Center for Children's Advocacy, [cca-ct.org](http://cca-ct.org)