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Monday February 25, 2019

Testimony from State Representative Jeff Currey
In Support Of
House Bill 6540 An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV

Representative Steinberg, Senator Abrams, Representative Petit, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6540. This legislation has been long-awaited by members of communities which desperately need it, and I sincerely hope that this year their waiting will be over.

HB 6540, An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV, asserts that the most effective and thorough manner of reducing the number of individuals diagnosed with HIV is through preventative treatment, and acknowledges that the prerequisite of parental consent for minors to receive those treatments creates a harmful obstacle and a higher number of diagnoses. Through amending the Connecticut General Statutes §19a-592 to allow for minors to receive preventative treatments before an HIV diagnoses, our state will make a commitment to supporting healthy and thoughtful medical practices from a young age.

Under current Connecticut law, youth who are at substantial risk of HIV infection cannot consent to taking HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). When taken daily, this pill reduces the risk

of HIV infection by up to 92%. According to the Center for Children's Advocacy, HIV diagnoses are decreasing among all transmission categories except men who have sex with men (MSM), and within this group individuals aged 13-24 are most at-risk.

The societal implications and context of this legislation cannot be ignored. If we are to understand that gay youth are most at-risk to contract HIV, and yet require by law that they have parental consent to receive life-saving preventative treatment, we are effectively requiring that they choose between their right to privacy and their right to medical treatment, possibly from a very young age. The emotional and psychological trauma that gay youth are suffering because of this juxtaposition cannot be understated, especially when we remember that too many MSM and members of the gay community are at risk of homelessness if they choose to come out to their family. Our state is better than this, and surely those who are most likely to suffer the devastating effects of the HIV epidemic deserve better as well.

Connecticut's current statutes surrounding this issue not only neglect gay youth, but cause them direct and irreversible harm. According to the Center for Children's advocacy, 52% of young MSM have undiagnosed HIV, meaning that our state's laws surrounding parental consent and PrEP are driving young MSM *away* from the doctor's office at their most vulnerable moment, instead of encouraging a healthy open dialogue about the thoughtful prevention of HIV.

In May of 2018, the FDA expanded the approval of Truvada for PrEP to adolescents as a result of extensive studies which found that it can significantly prevent the chance for new HIV infection without evidence of harmful effects on adolescents. It is vital that we ensure this medication be easily accessible to all individuals who are perceived as being at risk of contracting HIV, and that our law places an emphasis on respecting the privacy of individuals of all ages.

With all of this being said, I thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB 6540. I sincerely hope you will consider supporting HB 6540, An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV, and hope that you will reach out to me if I can provide any further information on this vital piece of legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

State Representative Jeff Currey

