

Testimony in Support of House Bill 6540
AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF HIV

By June Walker Holmes, LCSW
February 20, 2019

To the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I respectfully submit testimony in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*.

I have been personally and professionally affected by HIV/AIDS. I have witnessed the many faces of HIV/AIDS since the mid-1980s. As a social worker at YNHH, I have seen my patients succumb to the horrors and the darkness, as well as enjoy the hope for the present and future. I have seen the same in many of my friends.

We now have great promise in preventing, even eliminating, HIV. That promise is Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). Yet, access to PrEP (the pill Truvada) can be prohibitive for youth. Currently, providers cannot prescribe PrEP to teenagers without parental/guardian consent. Consequently, a teen cannot access this life-saving treatment without admitting to a parent/guardian that she/he is engaging in sexual relations. Often, teens avoid that discussion and may be putting themselves at risk of acquiring HIV.

When taken daily, PrEP reduces the risk of HIV infection by up to 92%. While youth can access treatment on their own *when infected*, they cannot freely access this preventative medicine. This bill would ensure that youth at risk for HIV have direct access to prophylaxis before they are burdened with life-long illness and treatment.

Allowing youth to consent for PrEP would foster trusting relationships between young people and their health care providers by opening new discussions regarding preventative care. Providers may also serve as entry points to resources and support for talking to family members or other trusted adults about issues related to HIV, sexual health and sexual identity.

I strongly support H.B. 6540 and I urge you to vote favorably for this essential and life-saving 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 youth. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

June Walker Holmes, LCSW
214 West Elm Street
New Haven CT 06515