



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Committee on Public Health
February 25, 2019**

IN SUPPORT OF HB 6540 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF HIV

To the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

We respectfully submit the following testimony in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*. ACOG is a membership organization dedicated to the advancement of women's health care through education, practice, research and advocacy. The Connecticut Section represents 935 obstetrician-gynecologists and partners in women's health here in our state.

As obstetricians and gynecologists, we take care of women and girls – as well as their partners – throughout the sexual and reproductive life course. Preventative health care – including infection and cancer screenings – is an essential component of the services we provide. In our daily work, we screen, test and treat women and girls of all ages for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. It is also our duty to inform and educate our patients about the best methods of prevention and risk reduction, including safe sex practices, expedited partner therapy and medication prophylaxis.

Despite progress in HIV treatment, HIV remains a significant public health concern. More than 10,000 people are living with HIV in Connecticut.¹ Young gay and bisexual men of color are particularly at risk.² There is still no cure available for HIV, and

¹ Connecticut Department of Public Health (2019), *HIV in Connecticut: Data Reported Through 2018*, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DPH/HIV-Surveillance/CT-HIV-Fact-Sheet.pdf?la=en>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), *HIV and Young Men Who Have Sex with Men*, https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sexualbehaviors/pdf/hiv_factsheet_ymsm.pdf

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treatment is complex, expensive, and life-long. Additionally, stigma, homophobia, and privacy concerns pose obstacles to HIV related testing and treatment for youth.

ACOG guidelines explicitly support use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a prescription-based daily medication for the prevention of HIV.¹ In Connecticut, minors may already consent to undergo screening and treatment of diagnosed HIV without parental consent.³ But currently, youth who are at substantial risk of HIV infection cannot consent to HIV PrEP without their parents' involvement. When taken daily, PrEP (an oral pill) reduces the risk of HIV infection by up to 92%. By adding language to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 19a-592, **HB 6540 would implement a targeted provision to ensure that youth at risk for HIV have direct access to prophylaxis before they are burdened with life-long illness and treatment.**

States like Connecticut have rightly recognized that requiring parental involvement in certain sensitive health decisions may deter minors from seeking timely care. Although taking PrEP carries a small risk of side effects, this risk is no different than that of the antiretroviral medications Connecticut youth may already consent to take for HIV treatment. As is true with respect to transmission, the state has a strong interest in preventing new HIV infections among minors as well as adults.

Finally, many of the youth who would most benefit from PrEP are unable to access it due to fear of parental rejection. As obstetricians and gynecologists, it remains our responsibility to 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 identity. Allowing Connecticut youth to consent to taking PrEP won't change our responsibility to serve as this entry point, but it will help us better foster trusting relationships with young people by enabling us to offer new avenues for preventative care.

Connecticut ACOG strongly supports H.B. 6540 and urges the Committee 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,

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³ Conn. Gen. Stat. §19a-592

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ⁱ Preexposure prophylaxis for the prevention of human immunodeficiency virus. Committee Opinion No. 595. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Obstet Gynecol 2014;123:1133-6.