

I am writing in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*, which would update existing state law to prevent the transmission of HIV among young people. Currently, minors may receive HIV treatment without parental consent – but they cannot independently consent to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a medication used to prevent HIV transmission in the first place.

My name is Robin McHaelen. I am the Executive Director of True Colors, Inc. Sexual Minority Youth and Family Services of Connecticut. We provide support, education, leadership development and advocacy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and non-binary youth. (LGBTQ+).

LGBTQ+ youth without parental support are at higher risk for virtually any risk factor you can name: suicidality, substance abuse, violence, homelessness AND sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Over the last five years, according to the statistics published by the CT State Department of Public Health, an average of 13 young people under the age of 20 were diagnosed with HIV each year. Many of those would have become infected prior to the age of 18. Access to PrEP could have prevented those infections.

In an ideal world, children would be able to go to their parents expecting (and receiving) love and support for their identity, even if their parent didn't approve. Parents might say that in an ideal world, children would not engage in behaviors that put them at risk. I have been doing this work for over 25 years. I can tell you from experience that is not how many parents respond. I can also tell you that some youth will be sexually active whether we want them to be or not.

What would you want for your child? What if, for whatever reason, your child felt they couldn't come to you asking for access to medication that would prevent a chronic and ultimately fatal illness? Would you want them to risk their future lives and health because they were too scared or embarrassed to talk to you? Or would you want them to take advantage of a medication that would prevent them from dying?

One last point, although I strongly support the passage of H.B. 6540, it is absolutely not enough. PrEP doesn't prevent other sexually transmitted infections. In 2015, the last year for which I could find CT statistics, there were 13,269 cases of chlamydia; 2092 cases of Gonorrhea, and 99 cases of Syphilis. Obviously, CT citizens of all ages are not getting the messages regarding safer sexual practices. Schools have the opportunity to make a profound difference in this area simply by using a comprehensive sexual health curriculum that includes LGBTQ+ youth. That is certainly an area that needs continued legislative support.

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