

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

By Elaine O'Keefe, February 25, 2019

To the Public Health Committee:

I am submitting testimony in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*. I am a public health professional who has worked on HIV/AIDS since the early days of the epidemic when there were few tools available to prevent transmission of the virus and an AIDS diagnosis was almost always a death sentence. It was a tragic time with much needless human suffering and premature death. Today we have many tools to prevent transmission of HIV and vastly improved treatment for those infected with the virus, supported by decades of research and medical advancements. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is one of those tools and it should be available to all who are at risk of acquiring HIV.

The proposed bill is of paramount importance to CT's goal of stopping new HIV infections because it will remove an existing barrier to HIV prevention for a critical group, namely our youth. Young people in CT face substantial risk of HIV infection yet they cannot receive PrEP, a prescription-based daily medication for the prevention of HIV, without parental consent. When taken daily, the medication reduces the risk of HIV infection by up to 92%. Under our current policy, youth can consent to treatment only after an HIV diagnosis when they face living with HIV for the rest of their lives. This bill would ensure that youth at risk for HIV have direct access to an effective prevention method, that can protect them from the burden of a life-long illness and treatment.

For all our progress the HIV epidemic remains a significant public health concern in our world, nation, and here in CT where over 10,000 people are currently living with HIV. There is still no cure available for HIV and treatment is complex, expensive, and life-long. Young gay and bisexual men of color are particularly at risk. By allowing minors to consent to PrEP we would reduce their risk of HIV infection. We would also reduce the large costs associated with HIV at the individual and societal level. Chronic diseases add to the burden of health care costs at a time when CT can ill afford such expenses. Prevention can lessen that burden.

I strongly support H.B. 6540 and I urge you to vote favorably for this important bill. Your support will protect the health and safety of CT youth. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine O'Keefe
21 Bohus Lane
Easton, CT
elaineokeefe@optonline.net

