

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED H.B. 6540
AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF HIV**

By Samuel Smith
Public Health Committee
February 25, 2019

Distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I write to urge you to favorably report H.B. No. 6540, An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV. I strongly support adding preventive and prophylaxis treatments to the permitted treatment of minors for human immunodeficiency virus infection in Conn. Gen. Stat. § 19a-592.

The battle of high school was nearly over. It was May of 2016 - my senior year at Wilbur Cross in New Haven. I had gone to prom, I had attended states for soccer, and I had taken my AP exams. Graduation was near, and I was preparing to move on to bigger and better things. I had known about my school's "Get Yourself Tested" day for a while, and I had convinced myself finally to participate. I thought, "What's the worst that could happen?"

Two weeks later, I was diagnosed with HIV, what would become an entirely new battle I was not ready to take on. I had become a statistic. Not only was I now one in four new HIV cases that occurs in youth ages 13 to 24, I was also one of the sixty percent of teens and young adults who does not know that they have HIV. I was one of the sixty percent that did not know how to seek prophylactic treatment and to practice safe sex to prevent others from also becoming a statistic.

At the time, my parents did not know I was sexually active with men, and I had no intention of telling them. Like many people in the gay community, I had known about PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, a treatment that can be used to help reduce the risk of getting HIV infection when used together with safer sex practices. As a minor, however, I was not able to consent to preventative or prophylaxis treatments. And I felt that keeping my personal life a secret was more important than my own health, so I did not seek out a prescription for PrEP, which could have been a potentially life-saving medication.

If I had been able to protect my health while protecting my privacy, I would have. That would have been clearly the no brainer decision—but that is not what current law allows. The present statute that allows treatment for individuals with STD's requires closeted individuals to choose between their privacy and their personal health if they choose to seek a prescription for PrEP. I chose my privacy, as many others in my community do. Had the law allowed me to protect myself from a lifelong infection as life threatening as HIV while also being able to protect my privacy, I would have easily taken that option and my entire life would now be different and drastically safer.

Thankfully, I am currently undetectable and my condition is manageable, but I live my life with a giant black cloud constantly looming over me. I am a junior at the University of

Miami, where I am studying mathematical economics and chemistry on the pre-medical track and spend many hours playing soccer and Frisbee under the Florida palms – the typical college experience. But my experience is also very different than that of my friends and classmates. I see my infectious disease specialist every four months for blood work, class schedule depending. I take a daily pill that I am ashamed to pull out of my backpack. I am scared to start dating because I do not want to put anyone what I went through and I struggle to see how anyone could see me in any light past my status.

I am a 20-year-old gay man living with HIV. The proposed change to section 19a-592 would help ensure that youth in Connecticut can consent to preventative and prophylaxis treatments *before* they, like me, are diagnosed with HIV. This change is such an easy one to make and I urge the Committee to support the amendment to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 19a-592 by voting favorably on H.B. 6540.

I thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Samuel Smith
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