

Proposed H.B. No. 6540
Session Year 2019

AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF HIV.

To increase access to preventative and prophylactic interventions for minors who are at risk of exposure to HIV.

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee

I am an HIV Specialist who has been caring for patients with HIV and AIDS for the past 36 years. During those 36 years of practice, I have seen many hundreds of patients die from this incurable disease. Fortunately today, we have good treatments that can assure a newly infected patient with HIV a near normal life expectancy. However, to maintain that person's life, in the absence of a cure, requires a lifetime of medical appointments and daily antiviral medications which come at a cost in time and resources to patients and our society at large.

In 2012, the FDA approved a medication that can prevent HIV when taken by people who have substantial risk of becoming infected. For the past five years I have been prescribing this Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to patients who have such high risk of becoming infected. In the United States, two thirds of all new HIV infections occur in predominantly young African American and Hispanic men who have sex with men. HIV is a disease that disproportionately affects people of color. An African American man who has sex with men has a 50% lifetime risk of HIV infection if we fail to improve prevention efforts. PrEP is such a prevention that has been proven to be effective by reducing HIV infection by better than 90% when taken daily.

Adolescents and young adults account for 50% of all sexually transmitted infections in the United States, and these infections cause inflammation that increases the likelihood of HIV infection. Of the last 12 newly HIV infected patients who have seen me, nearly all are young men of color who have sex with men. Had they had PrEP available to them and taken the medication daily, they would likely never have become infected with HIV. An adolescent girl with 3 or more Chlamydia infections carries a 5 times higher risk of becoming infected with HIV.

Since we already know that a high proportion of adolescents of school age are having sexual relations, we need to enhance our efforts at HIV prevention, which includes not only promotion of condom use,

but to those at high risk, the availability of Pre-exposure prophylaxis of HIV with medication. HIV carries significant stigma, and many adolescents fear talking about sexual relations with their parents. Being able to discuss their sexuality with a health care provider where they will not feel shame, and to have access to sound HIV prevention education and access to PrEP when needed is crucial to prevent any new HIV infections in Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,

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