

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

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To the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*. I am a medical provider and a strong advocate for HIV care in our community. I am affiliated with Yale University and I am an Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine in the Department of Medicine and a Medical Director for one of the HIV clinics at our institution.

I have been providing HIV care to thousands of CT residents over the past 25 years and I have personally seen the devastation and significant effect this disease has had on many of our patients' lives. Despite the many advances in the field, we are still seeing new infections occurring every year. More than 10,000 people are living with HIV in Connecticut.<sup>1</sup> Young gay and bisexual men of color are particularly at risk.<sup>2</sup> The majority of new infections that I see are in young adults. A significant proportion of them are from minority populations and those who are generally underserved.

I believe the proposed bill is important because it addresses a huge unmet need in the state. HIV infections disproportionately affect certain populations, including youth from 13 to 24 years old. This group has the highest rate of undiagnosed HIV in the United States, leading to delayed access to care and higher morbidity and mortality. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has been proven through clinical research to reduce the HIV transmission and infection among those at risk by as much as 100%. It is a prescription-based daily medication called Truvada® for the prevention of HIV. We started to offer PrEP to our adult population in 2014 and today we have close to 300 patients on Truvada. We have had no new HIV infection in our population.

We realize that adolescents and young adults are at substantial risk of HIV infection but cannot consent to PrEP without parental approval. Instead, youth can only consent to treatment after an HIV diagnosis. This bill would ensure that youth at risk for HIV have direct access to prophylaxis before they are burdened with life-long illness and treatment as there is still no cure available for HIV. *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV* would implement a targeted provision to address this harmful gap by adding language to Conn. Gen. Stat. § 19a-592.

Stigma, homophobia, and privacy concerns pose obstacles to HIV related testing and treatment for youth. Many of the youth who would most benefit from PrEP are unable to access it due to fear of parental rejection. Allowing youth to consent would foster trusting relationships between young people and adult providers by opening new avenues

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for preventative care. Providers may also 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.

I recently had a new patient come to our HIV clinic. He was a young 21 year old, black, gay male. He had a new HIV diagnosis and was overwhelmed by his situation. In reviewing his medical history I was able to find opportunities where a discussion of HIV prevention would have been highly appropriate and should have included some education about PrEP. Education that can start in high schools. The youth have access to school based clinics which is an ideal setting to teach them about sexual identity, sexual health and how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections.

I strongly support H.B. 6540 and I urge you 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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