

Public Health Committee Testimony – March 4, 2019

**HB6543: An Act Permitting Pharmacists to Prescribe Tobacco Cessation Products**

Good afternoon Senator Lesser and the Public Health Committee. My name is Stephanie Luon, and I am a licensed pharmacist practicing in the ambulatory care clinic setting within a health system in the state of Connecticut and a member of the Connecticut Society of Health-Systems Pharmacists. I am submitting written testimony on behalf of myself in strong support of HB6543: An Act Permitting Pharmacists to Prescribe Tobacco Cessation Products.

Cigarette smoking is estimated to cause more than 480,000 deaths annually contributing to smoking-related illness cost of more than \$300 billion per year in the United States alone. There has been an increase in the utilization of tobacco use and vaping products in young adults according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Connecticut Department of Public Health respectively. As highly accessible health care professionals, pharmacists are well positioned to initiate treatment and support individuals throughout the duration of their quit efforts. Approximately 91% of Americans live within 5 miles of a community pharmacy and visit the pharmacy an average of 30 times per year, while they see their physician an average of 3 times per year.

Patients who are able to quit smoking significantly reduce their risk for developing lung cancer, heart disease, certain other chronic lung diseases, and significantly prolong the quality and length of their lives. The risk of developing lung cancer drops by 30-50% after quitting and abstaining from smoking for five years according to the Journal of the National Cancer Institute. Currently 7 states have statutes or regulations that permit pharmacists to prescribe therapies to assist patients with tobacco cessation. Legislation has since been introduced in seven other states and several more states are considering proposing similar legislation.

Pharmacists are highly educated and graduate with a Doctor of Pharmacy Degree prior to completing national and state licensing exams. They then often participate in one or two years of additional residency training and sometimes fellowship training before settling into clinical roles. The Connecticut Department of Public Health has collaborated with the University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy to produce a nationally accredited 15 credit hour certificate program on tobacco cessation therapy. This program will provide training to pharmacists to initiate treatment, provide support to individuals throughout the quitting process, and be a referral to resources such as the CT Quitline for continued support of tobacco abstinence.

Due to the shortage of primary care physicians, pharmacists are frequently filling in gaps of care. Pharmacists have the ability to work closely with patients and check in frequently if necessary to assist, which is often helpful for patients seeking to abstain from the use of tobacco cessation products.

For these reasons, I support this bill that permits pharmacists to prescribe tobacco cessation products to improve access to care to patients in the state of Connecticut.