Bill No.: HB-5449
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DONATION OF BLOOD BY MINORS.
Vote Date: 3/1/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 2/11/2019
File No.: 

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill would allow individuals under the age of sixteen to donate blood with parental consent. Currently, the law states that a person must be seventeen or older and receive parental consent to donate. This concept arose after students from Newtown High School attempted to donate blood in an effort to support the fight against Multiple Myeloma. They were unable to donate because they were under the age of seventeen.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
None submitted.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:
Representative Mitch Bolinsky, 106th Assembly District: Representative Bolinsky offered strong support for the bill, as Connecticut is currently experiencing a shortage of available blood products. This shortage not only threatens the lives of individuals who need transfusions, but also presents a fiscal challenge by contributing to the rising cost of healthcare. Representative Bolinsky explained that his support for the bill began when two seniors from Newtown High School could not donate blood because they were under the age of seventeen. Representative Bolinsky continued to note that if individuals under the age of seventeen want to donate and are healthy enough to do so, then additional lives could be saved.

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA): The CHA supports the bill on the basis that state hospitals depend on voluntary blood donations to administer critical care to their patients.
Given the crucial nature of these donations, it is important that they are encouraged and accepted. In addition, the CHA argues that the earlier an individual is permitted to donate blood, the more likely they will be willing to continue to donate blood in the future. If this legislation is enacted, it will hopefully increase the supply of blood products in the state.

**Michael Enaye, Newtown:** As a student leader of Newtown High School’s blood drives, Michael Enaye has witnessed the impact the current law has on donation rates among his peers. According to his testimony, many students expressed frustration at the inability to donate given their age. Also, the school’s most recent blood drive drew some of the poorest results in school history. He noted that thirty-eight states have enacted similar legislation to this bill and within those states, sixteen-year-olds contribute to 10% of the supply. Given the blood shortage and the number of individuals under the age of seventeen willing to donate, this legislation would help alleviate the shortage.

**Harrison Eppers, Newtown:** Harrison Eppers expressed his support for the bill by citing the blood shortage that currently exists both on the state and national level. He noted that blood donations serve a wide range of purposes, including treatment for accidents and transfusions for cancer patients. The latter served as the primary influence for his advocacy, as he witnessed the impact that blood donations had on his mother’s cancer diagnosis. Similar to other testimony, he stated that a number of students under the age of seventeen expressed their frustration at the inability to donate blood. At the conclusion of his testimony, he stated that every pint of blood can save three lives. By extending the opportunity to donate to sixteen-year-olds, it would hopefully increase the supply of blood in the state.

**Rory Edwards, Newtown:** Rory Edwards spoke in favor of this bill after noticing the amount of sixteen-year-old students who wanted to donate blood, but were unable to due to the current law. Given the fact that blood donation is vital to patient care and that other states have enacted similar legislation, Connecticut should follow suit to allow eager donors to contribute to state hospitals.

**Shelley Eppers, Newtown:** Shelley Eppers spoke in support of the bill after witnessing her son’s experience organizing a blood drive. Ms. Eppers was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma in 2017 and while it is incurable, it is treatable through blood transfusions. During a blood drive at her son’s high school, a number of students were turned away for being underage. She noted that forty-five states currently allow students to donate at the age of sixteen with parental consent. Given the small number of individuals who donate blood annually, it is important to accept those willing to donate.

4 others offered testimony in support of HB 5449:
Eileen and Albert Gallo, Sandy Hook
Jeff Tolson
Karen Banks, Newtown
Sheila Blank, Stamford

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Nancy Newton, Quarantine Labeling Technician, CT Chapter of the American Red Cross:** In her testimony, Ms. Newton expressed concern that lowering the blood donation age would have a negative impact on young donors. To support her statement, she cited a
study conducted by *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, which highlighted that the rate of injury amongst sixteen and seventeen-year-old donors was higher than that of eighteen and nineteen-year-olds. The testimony also noted that in Connecticut, the American Red Cross does not mandate that nurses be present at blood drives. According to Ms. Newton, this could present an issue in the event of any complications that arise from the donation. To conclude, she proposed three amendments to the bill: prohibit payment to blood drive organizers, require a nurse to be present at blood drives, and require a parent or guardian’s signature on a DPH approved form that outlines the potential consequences of donating blood under the age of sixteen.

Reported by:  Meagan Schantz  
Date: 3/6/19