

# Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5043

AN ACT REQUIRING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR CERTAIN

**Title:** IMMUNIZATION CONSULTATIONS.

**Vote Date:** 2/24/2020

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/19/2020

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

The Public Health Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Starting January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2021, HB-5043 would require individual and group health insurance policies to cover a consultation regarding immunizations between a patient and their medical provider lasting at least 20 minutes.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Renée D. Coleman-Mitchell, MPH, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Public Health:** In her testimony, Commissioner Coleman-Mitchell expressed the Connecticut Department of Public Health's support of HB-5043. She states that healthcare providers are currently allowed to bill insurers for each individual vaccine administered to their patients, but not for time spent discussing the importance of immunizations with their patients. She reiterates that conducting consultations of at least 20-minutes is recommended by the national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Commissioner Coleman-Mitchell argues that this consultation could help combat some of the misinformation patients are given online and reiterates the importance of vaccines for preventing the spread of diseases like mumps and rubella. She concludes by highlighting the importance of HB-5043 in light of the recent reemergence of measles and urges the public not to become complacent to this emerging health concern.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Shelly Geballe, JD, MPh, Assistant Professor at Yale University:** In her testimony, Professor Geballe expresses her support for both HB-5043 and HB-5044. She starts by

listing her credentials to demonstrate knowledge from the public health, children and civil rights academic perspectives. She also provides an anecdote of her mother who suffered from polio, and her insistence that she and her siblings be vaccinated immediately after the polio vaccine was released. From a public health perspective, she argues that vaccines are necessary to protect the overall population and to create herd immunity, and that refusing to be vaccinated comes from a place of complacency due to the rarity of now vaccine-preventable diseases. She finds that vaccination is necessary to protect the immunocompromised. From a medical perspective, she cites new policies from The American Medical Association and The American Academy of Pediatrics which aim to limit exemptions for vaccination to those of a medical nature. Finally, from a legal perspective she cites both precedent and the opinion of Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, of which both emphatically support the constitutionality and legality of removing the religious exemption. Professor Geballe concludes by thanking the committee for raising HB-5043 and HB-5044 and for hearing public testimony.

**Richard Souza, a constituent of East Hartford:** In his testimony, Mr. Souza argues that being informed is always a good thing in healthcare, and that HB-5043 gives medical providers a financial incentive to provide their patients with necessary information.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Wayne Rawlins, MD, Chief Medical Officer for ConnectiCare:** In his testimony, Dr. Rawlins argues that HB-5043 is redundant as medical providers should already be having necessary discussions with their patients regarding immunizations based on individualized demographic information. He claims that this conversation should not be considered separate from the wellness exam. Finally, Dr. Rawlins concludes that if the Committee finds that these consultations are not happening when they should then that may be a different issue requiring a different solution. Dr. Rawlins remarked that ConnectiCare is very supportive of immunizations, just not HB-5043.

**Connecticut Association of Health Plans:** The Connecticut Association of Health Plans urges the rejection of HB-5043. They echo the opinion of ConnectiCare, whereby they fully support vaccinations, but feel as though discussions with patients on vaccinations should be happening during the wellness exam and not separated from it. The Connecticut Association of Health Plans also feels that if these conversations are not happening as they should be, HB-5043 will not fix the problem, though educating medical providers might pose a potential solution.

**Michelle Rakebrand, Assistant Council for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association:** In her testimony, Attorney Rakebrand expresses the Connecticut Business and Industry Association's opposition to HB-5043 because the bill is a health benefit mandate that would raise the cost of premiums. She argues that healthcare is often listed as one of the top concerns for Connecticut employers. Attorney Rakebrand highlights the importance of healthcare coverage but argues that the cost can often outweigh the benefits in this instance. Before moving forward, she encourages the Public Health Committee to recontinue the Health Benefit Review Program which authorizes the Connecticut Insurance Department to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of any insurance mandates per the legislature's request.

**Diane Connors, a constituent of Tolland County:** In her testimony, Ms. Connors expresses her opposition to both HB-5043 and HB-5044, though the majority of her comments were directed at HB-5044. She argues that diseases are not only spread in school and that both bills target individual freedoms on which America is founded. She bases her arguments against the bill on a need for religious and individual freedoms. She includes quotes from other pieces of testimony and laws from other states to support her claims.

**Priscilla E., a constituent of Bridgeport:** In her testimony, Ms. E. argues that more information from her doctor would not change her opinion on vaccines, and that she had to seek out information on vaccines on her own from the Connecticut Department of Health in the past after not receiving it from her doctor.

**Pam Lucashu, a constituent of Durham:** In her testimony, Ms. Lucashu argues that HB-5043's mandate is unlikely to change the minds of those against vaccination and if anything, further damage the relationships between those against vaccination and their medical providers.

**Sue McIntosh, MD:** In her testimony, Dr. McIntosh defines herself as a "realized anti-vaxxer" due to her experience with vaccines. She argues that vaccines do not provide the same durable protection as getting diseases like the measles or mumps would. She follows that the immunocompromised are better protected surrounded by the unvaccinated and that vaccines can destroy the immune system. She concludes that the world outside the U.S. is aware of the significant medical complications that can arise from vaccines, like autism and cancer.

**Barbara R., a constituent of Trumbull:** In her testimony opposing HB-5043 and HB-5044, Ms. R. identifies herself as representing the parents of at least 3,700 immunocompromised children with Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder Associated with Streptococcal infection and Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome in Connecticut. She argues that the community of immunocompromised children were not included in press conferences regarding the religious exemptions, and if they were, they would have used the platform to express their opposition. She continues that unvaccinated children have better antibodies than vaccinated children, something the immunocompromised depend on. She also argues that vital information like efficacy rates are being withheld by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. She concludes by stating that there is no necessity for the bills because most Connecticut residents are cooperating with the Connecticut Department of Public Health on this issue.

**Reported by: Hannah Lauer**

**Date: 02/28/2020**