

# Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-568

AN ACT ELIMINATING THE NONMEDICAL EXEMPTION TO THE

**Title:** IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENT.

**Vote Date:** 3/31/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/16/2021

**File No.:** 555

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

The Public Health Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill eliminates the religious exemption from immunization requirements for individuals attending (1) public and private schools, including higher education institutions, and (2) child care centers and group and family day care homes. Additionally, this bill grandfather's students enrolled in grades kindergarten or higher who possessed a religious exemption before the bill's passage. The grandfathered exception continues if students transfer to another public or private school in the state.

Students with prior religious exemption and enrolled in a pre-kindergarten or preschool program must comply with state immunization requirements by September 1, 2022, or within 14 days after transferring to another public or private program. These children may extend the compliance timeframe with a written declaration from their physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse outlining the recommendation for an alternative vaccination schedule. The Department of Public Health (DPH) must create medical exemption certificates by October 1, 2021, for providers to complete for students medically contraindicated for vaccination based on physical condition.

This bill requires the DPH to release non-identifiable information with annual immunization rates from each public and private K-12 school. It creates an 11-member DPH Vaccine Advisory Committee to advise the commissioner and report their findings to the Public Health Committee. The bill also requires the DPH to work with the Department of Education and the Office of Early Childhood to evaluate vaccine exemption data and report their findings to the Public Health and Education Committees.

Health insurance policies that cover prescription drugs must cover at least a 20-minute consultation appointment between parents and their child's health care provider to discuss immunizations and the parent's concerns.

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

### **Senator Martin Looney, 11<sup>th</sup> District:**

I support House Bill 6423 and Senate Bill 568, eliminating the non-medical exemption for vaccinations in grades Pre-K through 12, daycare settings, and higher education institutions.

A significant number of parents across the United States are choosing not to have their children immunized. These decisions, combined with the lack of vaccine access in some areas of the world, have created international concern. We have seen outbreaks of deadly diseases, like measles, once declared eliminated in the United States. The unfounded fears of vaccines contributed to a measurable decline in immunization rates, and in 2019 alone, 1,282 individual confirmed cases of measles confirmed in 31 states.

Connecticut should not exempt children from vaccination requirements solely on the religious beliefs of their parents. Adult rights to freely practice religion do not extend to damaging the welfare of their children or other children in the community. Children depend on their parents and guardians to protect their health and well-being. A parent's choice not to vaccinate their child significantly increases the probability of the child suffering from easily preventable diseases. However, this decision may have an even more devastating effect on children who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons and depend on "herd immunity" for protection. 2019 Department of Public Health data revealed vaccination rates for measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine for kindergarteners fell below the 95% federal recommendation rate in 134 schools.

In 2019, New York and Maine removed their religious exemption for immunization in alignment with California, West Virginia, and Mississippi. California eliminated non-medical exemptions in 2015 following the "Disneyland" measles outbreak which ultimately infected 131 people. By 2017, California's vaccination rate, which had fallen to 92.3% in 2013, was up to 96.9%.

*According to Attorney General William Tong, there is "no serious or reasonable dispute as to the State's broad authority to require and regulate immunizations for children: the law is clear that the State of Connecticut may create, eliminate or suspend the religious exemption... in accordance with its well-settled power to protect public safety and health. The exercise of this authority is fully consistent with the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Connecticut."*

By eliminating non-medical exemptions to mandatory vaccination policies, we stand up for our children and medically fragile people in our communities who cannot be vaccinated against preventable diseases. It's well past time that we pass this critical legislation.

### **Representative Jay Case, 63<sup>rd</sup> District:**

House Bill 6423 and Senate Bill 568 are two legislative proposals that hit close to home for me both as a father and Connecticut resident. Parents and individuals should be able to

maintain their right to make informed decisions regarding their health and safety and for their children. The State has the right to intervene on behalf of the welfare of a resident or community. The State does not have the right to intervene if a child is not vaccinated. Government should not dictate if someone can embrace particular religious beliefs or natural and alternative medicine modalities. Connecticut is a freedom state. Enacting legislation that infringes on the rights of citizens is not in alignment with our call to be representatives of the public's best interests.

Forty-five states and Washington D.C. allow exemptions for people who object to immunizations due to their religious beliefs dating back to the 18th century to protect religious freedom. There is no documented evidence that unvaccinated school children are causing outbreaks in our schools. I believe the issue of allowing equal access to an education regardless of race or religious beliefs deserves protection. This is more important now than ever as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

These two proposals are an invasion of our most important rights, religious freedom, and the right over our health and bodies.

**Senator Rob Sampson, 16<sup>th</sup> District:**

I am submitting testimony in opposition to House Bill No. 6423 and Senate Bill No. 568. While I am not opposed to immunizations, I am passionately opposed to the idea of the government forcing immunization upon the populace and the attack on personal freedom that it represents.

This type of legislation is nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to eliminate the individual liberty of parents to make health choices for themselves and their children. I believe legislation like this is a dangerous course for the General Assembly to pursue as it disproportionately targets a minority population and forces them to choose between their personal religious or health beliefs and the ability to offer their children a public education.

I urge the committee to not move forward with these pieces of legislation.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Benjamin Cherry, MD, Health and Public Policy Co-Chair, Connecticut Chapter of the American College of Physicians (ACP):**

The ACP support H.B. No. 6423. Public health and safety measures are based on the age-old idea of a social contract, in which we sacrifice some freedoms for the greater benefit of society.

Unscientific (and in some cases, theologically dubious) claims of liberty to decline school-entry immunizations have led to declining vaccination rates in Connecticut, inviting tragedy to our state. Connecticut granted religious exemptions from vaccination for 2.5% of new kindergarten and 1.2% of new 7th grade students for the 2018-2019 school year, totaling 1.8% of so-called "new school enterers." This is a six-fold increase in students claiming religious exemptions since the state began distinguishing exemption types in 2003.

Over the same time frame, by contrast, medical exemptions have stayed flat at 0.2%. The results of this increase are predictable and worrisome: overall measles, mumps, and rubella

(MMR) vaccination rates have fallen below 95%—a threshold recognized to be critical for outbreak prevention—in more than 130 Connecticut schools, with a steady decline observed over the last decade.

Vaccines have proven to be safe and extremely effective in establishing herd immunity, protecting infants and children for whom vaccines may be genuinely unsafe. People of all ages were among the 649 people affected during the measles outbreak in New York City. These were primarily young children who were not fully vaccinated (including 34 children <5 years old) and older people who had lost some of the protective effects of earlier vaccination.

Opponents of this bill are largely well-meaning parents who have been exposed to misinformation about vaccine safety and misattribution of medical problems following vaccination. Such “injuries” are about 1 per 2.4 million vaccines given.

It is our obligation to stand with you in protecting Connecticut’s most vulnerable citizens, and we asked that you eliminate non-medical vaccine exemptions this session.

**Connecticut Academy of Physician Assistants (ConnAPA):**

Connecticut Academy of Physician Assistants (ConnAPA) supports HB 6423. Vaccinations have proven to be one of the most successful and effective public health initiatives. There is scientific proof that rebukes the often-propagated concerns by those who do not support vaccinations.

The inclusion of PAs in areas of certification and as a member of the advisory committee established by this legislation is greatly appreciated. PAs work across all specialties and practice settings, assessing, diagnosing, and treating disease while providing preventative and primary care.

**Paul Pescatello, Senior Counsel and Executive Director of the Connecticut Bioscience Growth Council (CBGC):**

The Connecticut Bioscience Growth Council (CBGC) is in support of HB 6423 and SB 568. CBGC established the "Science Matters Work Group", to better understand public health policy surrounding vaccine science. Connecticut has invested in life sciences as a means to help patients and their families find effective treatments and cures and build a new pillar for job creation across the Connecticut economy.

CBGC is about advocating for scientific inquiry and following the hard data that flows from it. In the case of childhood immunizations, the data is clear and the following three areas will illustrate just how critical it is to ensure that Connecticut children receive life-saving immunizations:

- Immunization saves nearly six million lives each year. The basic science and decades of clinical research surrounding immunizations demonstrate the safety of vaccination. Immunization’s benefits dramatically outweigh the strikingly small risks associated with it. We often forget the misery caused by diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella and polio.
- Immunization prevents long-term disability. People who survive preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella and polio often suffer lifelong and life-diminishing

complications. Many of us are unaware of the children who cope with lifelong cognitive impairment resulting from brain swelling (encephalitis) caused by a measles infection. Since 2000, because of vaccination, more than 20 million children (worldwide) have avoided death from measles.

- Immunization protects those who for medical reasons cannot be vaccinated or for whom vaccination is not effective.

Community or “herd” immunity only works if 95% or more of the community is vaccinated. Unfortunately, there are now 120 Connecticut schools with a student population below this 95% threshold for the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines. There are 26 schools below 90%. Disregarding the science and sound public policy behind childhood vaccination puts at risk those who can’t be vaccinated for medical reasons.

**Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE):**

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) supports HB 6423 and SB 568. Concerns for the health and well-being of students and staff compelled board of education members to approve a resolution at the November 2019 Delegate Assembly to urge the General Assembly to remove the religious exemption from vaccinations for measles, mumps, and rubella for students attending k-12 public schools.

Having a student body with immunization rates that fall below the CDC federal guideline of 95% is alarming and dangerous to those individuals who are prohibited from receiving the vaccine based on their medical frailty.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated, the outbreak of disease, should it necessitate closing school, puts ALL students behind in their achievement and has serious impact on their social emotional needs. It jeopardizes state and federal funding due to a reduction in the annual student count. Vaccination of our students, unless they have a medical exemption is essential to maintaining our public education system.

**Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) supports HB 6423 and SB 568 which would eliminate the Nonmedical Exemption to the Immunization Requirement. All Connecticut hospitals strive to improve the health of our communities, whether it is partnering with community-based organization to address social determinants of health, treating a patient in need of care at 2:00 a.m. in the Emergency Department, or employing science-based best practices for infectious disease control.

Vaccines are one of the success stories of modern medicine, spanning the 19th, 20th, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, with millions of lives saved because of vaccines. Vaccines continue to be developed and utilized for a range of infectious diseases, and now vaccines are even used to prevent cancer, with the use of the HPV (Human Papillomavirus) vaccine shown to decrease not only the rate of infection, but also the rate of multiple cancers associated with HPV infection.

Vaccines are being used to stop the spread of COVID-19 across the world, with a

growing rate of trust in COVID-19 vaccines in the United States. The influenza vaccine has recently been shown to be associated with reduced hospital mortality in patients treated in states where influenza vaccine is mandated.

Immunizations, or vaccines, are used to develop immunity to an illness and have been embraced across the globe as a prevention strategy for illness. Over 116 million children worldwide were immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus alone in 2018, preventing two to three million deaths. Polio is close to being eradicated worldwide, and thanks to immunizations, the United States has been polio-free since 1979.

Measles-related deaths declined between 2000 and 2017 by 80 per cent worldwide, with more than 20 million children avoiding death from measles infection. Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000, but because of travel from endemic countries, lack of immunization, and lack of herd immunity, measles is starting to reappear. Herd immunity is a population response to vaccination and the level of vaccination needed to achieve herd immunity varies by disease and ranges from 83 to 94 percent.”

Controversy over the need for immunizations is not new and there is a long history of science denial and distrust for evidence-based medicine that can skew public discourse and confuse consumers. When the benefits of immunization are compared to the risks of immunization, the science in favor of immunizations is overwhelming.

The science behind the development of vaccines and the practice of immunization are proven to save and improve the lives of countless citizens around the world, in the U.S., and in the state of Connecticut. Hospitals are committed to providing care that is based on the best clinical practices that yield the very best outcome.

**Selina K. Bell:**

As a mother of three children, I fully support the elimination of the non-medical exemption for vaccines for children attending school and day care. For too long, we have allowed parents to use non-medical/religious exemption to endanger the lives of their own children and others. All children deserve the "choice" of a healthy life, and by continuing to surrender to the anti-science/anti-vax movement, we are stealing that "choice" from many children. Not only do the children of the anti-science crowd lose their "choice" to live free from the threat of infectious diseases, but the children around them who cannot be immunized for actual medical reasons lose their "choice" to attend school without the fear of becoming seriously ill.

Life expectancy rate has increased from 54 in 1920 to 79 in 2020; the U.S. cancer mortality rate declined by 27% in 25 years, and the infant mortality rate decreased by 80.5% from 1950 to 2018. The chances of having a serious, adverse reaction to the MMR is 0.000001%.

The 2019 measles outbreak in Samoa is a classic example of the damage that can be caused when vaccine rates drop. An outbreak like that in Connecticut would be devastating, especially during a pandemic. Religious freedom should not include the "choice" to harm or kill another human being. Over 90% of all the scientists and medical experts in the world understand that vaccines are our best defense against infectious diseases.

**CONNECTICUT CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS:**

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is in support of HB 6423.

Following are facts about vaccines:

- Vaccines do not make a child sick with the disease, and they do not weaken the immune system.
- Vaccines introduce a killed/disabled antigen into the body so the immune system can produce antibodies against it and create immunity to the disease.
- Vaccines provide protection from 14 diseases by age 2.
- With combination vaccines this protection is given in 18 doses, 26 doses if not using combination vaccines.
- Alternative schedules offer no advantage and increase the risk of errors.
- The immune system responds to the number of antigens in vaccines. In the 1980's there were over 3,000 antigens; today's vaccines have less than 130 antigens.
- There are no fetal tissue cells in vaccines given to children.
- There is no evidence that vaccines cause autoimmune disorders.
- There are clear, evidence-based guidelines on specific vaccines to be avoided in specific medical conditions.
- Pediatricians do not financially benefit from immunizing children.
- Immunizing US children born between 1994 and 2018 will prevent 419 million illnesses, help avoid 936,000 deaths and save \$1.9 trillion in total societal costs.

### **General Vaccine Safety**

- Anaphylaxis following vaccine is rare, approximately one in one million doses.
- Few deaths can plausibly be attributed to vaccines that it is hard to assess the risk statistically.
- The Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) is a no-fault alternative to the traditional legal system for resolving vaccine injury petitions. It was created in the 1980s, after lawsuits against vaccine companies and health care providers threatened to cause vaccine shortages and reduce U.S. vaccination rates, which could have caused a resurgence of vaccine preventable diseases.
- All vaccines are rigorously tested. Vaccines are not perfect, but the benefits far outweigh the risks (the legal definition of "unavoidably unsafe").
- From 2006 to 2018 over 3.7 billion doses of covered vaccines were distributed in the U.S.
- For petitions filed in this time period, 7,031 petitions were adjudicated by the VICP Court, and of those 4,888 were compensated. This means that for every 1 million doses of vaccine that were distributed, approximately 1 individual was compensated.
- 70 percent of all compensation awarded by the VICP comes as result of a negotiated settlement between the parties in which Health and Human Services has not concluded, based upon review of the evidence, that the alleged vaccine(s) caused the alleged injury.
- Since 2017 most claims have been from adults, not children.

### **Executive Board of the Connecticut Infectious Diseases Society:**

The Executive Board of the Connecticut Infectious Diseases Society is in support of Raised Bill 6423. This testimony does not reflect the opinion of our affiliated hospitals and academic institutions.

We have witnessed tremendous advances in the field of infection prevention and the life-

saving advances of vaccinations. Unfortunately, we have also provided care to patients who have suffered from vaccine-preventable illnesses, and some whose immune systems are extremely weakened. These patients are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases and are more likely to die once infections occur.

The protection of these vulnerable individuals relies heavily on the immunity of individuals who are eligible to receive the vaccine. Additionally, infants are often too young to become fully immunized as are elderly adults who were previously immunized as children.

From a scientific perspective, understanding the contagiousness of these infections is imperative. The scientific literature demonstrates that measles has a secondary attack rate of approximately 90% meaning that when a person with measles enters a room and comes in close contact with 10 people who are non-immune, 9 of the exposed, non-immune people will become infected. Failure to achieve herd immunity could result in sustained disease transmission, long term health consequences and unnecessary deaths.

The recent measles outbreak in New York City has demonstrated the devastating personal, social, and economic impact on a non-vaccinated community and the risk it poses to those who cannot be vaccinated. That same year the New England Journal of Medicine reported the investigation by the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene involved 559 staff members (7% of the agency personnel) and cost the agency 8.4 million dollars. Over 10 months, 649 cases occurred (86% were unvaccinated), 7.6% required hospitalization, and of those 40% needed ICU care. In September of 2020, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention published in a review that showed the median cost per case was \$32,805, and median cost per contact was \$223.

We have seen cases of measles in Connecticut as well as a recent cluster of students with mumps at the UConn Storrs campus. Without protective vaccination rates in these communities, either of these incidents may have led to a serious outbreak of disease in Connecticut. We are concerned about the rising rate of non-medical vaccines exemptions in Connecticut because it is making our state vulnerable to the previous epidemics experienced in New York and California who have since eliminated their non-medical vaccine exemptions. The rising rates of religious exemptions among Connecticut's kindergarten students is putting our stats at risk.

**Dr. Robert Dudley, Immediate Past President, Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics:**

The Connecticut American Academy of Pediatrics strongly backs the removal of all non-medical exemptions for vaccination for school attendance. As a physician I have been fortunate to see the effects of vaccines on public health firsthand. Several diseases that were common when I was a medical student are rare to non-existent today. With the diseases from my grandparent's generation (measles, polio, mumps and rubella) and the 2019 measles outbreak in New York, we cannot let our guard down. Failure to maintain adequate immunization rates opens the door for diseases to return.

The time to act is now, and I encourage you to eliminate all non-medical immunization exemptions for attendance in Connecticut schools. Vaccines are safe and effective, and serious adverse events from vaccination are exceedingly rare. They are licensed by the FDA

and undergo rigorous testing and monitoring. For 'herd immunity' to effectively prevent the spread of diseases such as measles, everyone who can be immunized must be immunized.

The costs of having a vaccine preventable disease introduced to a school are significant. As a school medical advisor, I have watched as dozens of children had to be excluded from school for weeks due to an unimmunized family bringing active cases of Varicella into the system. In addition to the risk that immunocompromised children would contract the disease, affected families had to contend with arranging child care and the Board of Education had to pay for tutors for exempt students for the duration of the 21 days incubation period.

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

### **LeeAnn Ducat, Founder, Informed Choice CT:**

Informed Choice CT has a membership of almost 2,000 members. After networking with almost all of them, I can tell you that this bill will absolutely backfire. You may not like it or what I have to say, but I'm right. Please reference the written testimony submitted by John W. Travis, MD who clearly delineates how bad removing the religious exemption was for the state of California.

In a nutshell, families fled, Democrats became vilified. Many parents chose to homeschool their children, which cost the public education system an enormous amount of money. Most concerning was the sharp increase in special needs, as the catch-up schedule was too much for some children to safely handle. The same will happen here in Connecticut. This decision will have an impact on thousands of children, families, teachers and grandparents. It will disproportionately affect low income and minority populations.

Last year this issue garnered the longest public hearing in state history, and this year more people than ever before signed up to speak at a public hearing. A petition with 15,000 signatures to postpone this virtual hearing were submitted and dismissed. There is another petition signed by 11,000 people pleading with the Senate to kill these bills. I urge you to oppose SB 568 and HB 6423 because you're supposed to solve problems, not create them.

### **Doreen Dunlap:**

I urge you to vote NO on SB 568 and HB 6423. Removing the religious exemption is completely unnecessary and in fact is an attack upon people's First Amendment rights. There is no medical emergency regarding the current vaccine schedule, our state has a very high percentage of vaccinated children, and in no way shape or form should the small amount of religious exemptions cause any room for concern.

### **Dustin Alley, Pastor, Bristol, CT:**

A bill restricting or removing the religious rights of individuals in America should not pass or even be discussed on the House or Senate floor. The First Amendment protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Members who vote in support of this measure should be removed from office based on dereliction of duty.

The religious exemption should always exist, and all Connecticut residents should be able to choose what vaccines, immunizations, other medical treatments and procedures they will

allow for themselves and any child in their care.

I'm praying for your success in carrying out your oath of office because your success means success for Connecticut.

**Dr. Karen Bavaro-Lawlor:**

I oppose HB 6423 and SB 568 because this is an infringement of our first amendment rights. Our country was founded on religious freedom and this right should never be removed from us. It is my primary and fundamental right as a parent to make decisions regarding the nurturing and care of my child. My child should never be discriminated against or not allowed in a school because of our personal and religious vaccination decisions. Please allow parents the right to choose what is best for their children and their bodies.

**Abby Beale:**

I am adamantly opposed to SB 568 and HB 6423 that seeks to strip away the religious freedom of CT residents to make informed healthcare choices for themselves and their families. I am a college educated longtime resident of CT, mother of two sons and someone who doesn't take their health decisions lightly.

This bill is unconstitutional and downright punishing for the child who has to endure the vilification of his community and for the parents who would have to leave the workforce to homeschool their children.

My research proves that science is flawed, the research process is far from perfect, and there are inadequacies of peer review that points to the fact that many published results simply can't be replicated. The crisis had gotten so bad that the editor of The Lancet Medical Journal, Richard Horton in 2015 lamented, "Much of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue." The journal "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences" reported that among the more than 2,000 retracted life science papers that researchers reviewed, a whopping 70 percent were pulled as a result of scientific misconduct. An increase in vaccines correlates with an increase in health disorders.

I say no to being brainwashed into thinking that all these vaccines are the answer to our collective health. As Americans and as residents of the state of CT, we deserve the God-given freedom to make our own decisions. CHOICE is the American way!

**Debra Candelora:**

I oppose SB 568 and HB 6423. Removing the religious exemption would force many parents to make healthcare decisions that are not based on what they and their pediatrician feel is in the best interest of their child and it will also be a deciding factor on the child's ability to attend school, which is a constitutional right.

I am the mother of 11 children, 3 of which are direct birth and 8 are adopted.

As a mother who has been parenting for over 37 years, I can tell you that, in that time frame, not only have I seen vaccinations rates rise, but I've also watched autoimmune disorders that weren't even a thing when my oldest was young.

I work alongside the State of Connecticut in the city of Meriden as a Support Liaison for Foster Families. Meriden is very diverse city, and one that is home to many lower income families. I can tell you that the passage of this bill will disproportionately affect the families I

work with. They will be coerced into making medical decisions that they may be uncomfortable with. Many families who prefer to opt out of some of the newer vaccines cannot afford to homeschool their children. I am in staunch opposition to any legislation that further restricts the rights of parents.

**Connecticut Freedom Alliance, LLC:**

We oppose SB 568 and HB 6423. The title of SB 568 is deceptive and the content of H.B 6423 seeks not only to eliminate the religious exemption, but also to effectively eliminate medical exemptions, resulting in an untold number of children being effectively forced to choose between their health, their lives, and their fundamental right to an education.

Even those who hold firm to their religious convictions and opt instead for remote learning will not escape dire consequences, as we have seen a dramatic increase in anxiety, depression, and even suicides among children who were forced into the isolation chamber of remote learning over the last year. Children in grades 7 through 12 with an exemption on file would be able to keep it. This clearly shows that there is no public health emergency and no justification to eliminate the religious exemption.

**Liz Lockwood:**

I am asking you to oppose SB 568 and HB 6423. Freedom of religion is protected under the constitution in the First Amendment AND the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment says that when a state establishes public education no child living in that state may be denied equal access to that education.

It goes against my religion to do harm unto others and I think we would all agree that there are risks associated with vaccinating our children and genetics and predispositions can magnify those risks for certain individuals.

A “one size fits all” is a dangerous approach. As a former mental health therapist and currently a stay at home mother, I have concerns regarding the ramifications of forcing kids to be vaccinated to stay in school. This bill is not about me, it’s about the students that would be forced to be vaccinated if this bill passes and the mental and physical health risks they would be facing. The removal of the religious exemption would force me to knowingly put my son at risk by having him endure over 70 doses of vaccines to attend public school?

This is unacceptable in America, the land of the free.

**Melanie MacDonald:**

I oppose both SB 568 and HB 6423 as they call for the removal of the religious exemption. This is 100% unconstitutional, illegal, unethical, and immoral. This testimony is not about pro-vaccination or anti-vaccination, it is about preserving our inherent rights. Both the 1st amendment and the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment SPECIFICALLY PROHIBITS the state from making any law that violates the free exercise of one's religious beliefs.

Writing the religious exemption clause into the immunization statute was never necessary because people already had the right to religious freedom.

The statement made by Attorney General William Tong about the State’s broad authority to require and regulate immunizations for children ... is a fallacy. It is the people that tell the

government what is and is not constitutional, as the government is the creature and the people are the creator. It's the people who created government and gave them specific rules to follow when governing. Nowhere in either the federal or the Connecticut State Constitution are legislators granted the power over our health care. To get that authority, you must amend the constitution.

**Raymond F. Massey:**

I strongly urge you to oppose HB 6423 and SB 568. The removal of religious exemption is allowing the government to overrule the actions of the church. What were once the required vaccines for just MMR, Polio and DPT has now risen to 50 shots fighting just 16 diseases.

As a grandfather whose grandchildren are both smart and athletic, I firmly oppose these bills. I would like to see them graduate and watch as they become strong contributing citizens to our society. This cannot be achieved if these bills pass into law and their health and wellbeing become compromised and their ability to grow academically is denied.

**Connor McNamara:**

I am asking you to oppose HB 6423. The passage of this bill is a violation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The removal of the religious exemption that protects children from vaccinations conflicts with the spiritual beliefs of both the children and parents. The passage of this bill will deprive American citizens of their bodily autonomy. It is a basic human right to consent or refuse a medical treatment. No one besides the individual themselves, or in the case of children, a parent or guardian, should be making any decision about what treatments their body will receive. Informed consent is a basic right.

If this bill were to pass, my family will be forced to make difficult adjustments to our life in this state that we love and have always called home. Choices surrounding healthcare have and always will be difficult for parents and individuals as consideration is given to the risks and benefits of the treatment options. Please, do not take our ability to choose away from us.

**Nadia Nazeer:**

I am 11 years old. I was injured after receiving my six-month vaccine. Today I battle asthma and severe allergies. I receive my education through distance learning because I cannot wear a mask. Why was I given vaccines when there was a risk of injury? I may be just a child, but I know that vaccines can do serious harm. I oppose HB 6423.

**Cassidy Ward O'Brien:**

My name is Cassidy Ward O'Brien and I live in North Haven, CT. I am writing to oppose SB 568 and HB 6423. I strongly believe people should have the right to choose and to make their own decisions on vaccines. If there is a risk, there should be a choice.

**Dr. Sarah Olchanowski:**

I am a Christian wife and mother, as well as a Doctor of Audiology. I am writing to express my opposition to HB 6423 and SB 568. I understand that the intention of the proposed legislation is to preserve the health Connecticut's citizens. While this noble, the bill itself is impractical and fallible.

The claim that the religious exemption to vaccination is overused by individuals who have no spiritual basis is false. It is not the responsibility of the state to dictate the beliefs of an

individual's conscience and the claim that these individuals are contributing to a public health crisis is false. There is no credible evidence of preventable infectious disease outbreak in the 60-year history of the state's Religious Exemption.

Should these bill pass, not only would my children be barred from their constitutional right to education, but also it encourages discrimination and hate speech based on our religious beliefs. It is disappointing to think that we may have to remove our children from a school in which they are thriving, and my husband or I may have to quit our job or relocate out of the state. Please consider our family, and the families of others with similar spiritual beliefs, when you cast your vote in opposition of this legislation.

**Richard Sena, MD:**

Please oppose the elimination of the religious exemptions from vaccination for children attending CT schools. We cannot hold education hostage in order to increase vaccination rates when our vaccination rates are already extremely high. This is a discriminatory piece of legislation that is extremely regressive. Consent given via coercion is not consent. People will leave Connecticut in search religious freedom and that doesn't sit well.

**Douglas Sanford:**

No one should have power over what I choose is done with my child. You will not just inject my child with anything you choose! You have no right. My body is my temple. My Child, My Choice! I urge you to oppose HB 6423.

**M. Santiago:**

As a parent of four children who attend a private Christian School, I strongly oppose HB 6423. My children are healthy and not causing harm to anyone.

Having the majority votes to pass bills does not justify you taking away the freedom of the minority. My beliefs are not up for debate and you will not change them by passing this bill and getting rid of the religious exception. Your action will only deny my children and thousands of others their right to continue their education by attending their Christian school. You will also force our family to either quit our jobs and home school our children or move out of state.

**Campbell Scott:**

I oppose the passage of HB 6423 and SB 568. I have been a resident of Connecticut for 30 years and my three sons (23, 9 & 4) years old attended Connecticut public school. They are all healthy, and my wife and I take seriously our responsibility to keep them safe while they are in our care.

Removing the religious exemption and mandating vaccinations for children and teens as a requirement for their constitutionally guaranteed education is counterproductive and against common sense. Families will be forced to either betray our beliefs and responsibilities, home school our children, or leave a state. None of these options are viable choices for so many of us.

There is no health emergency and we understand our responsibilities are not just for our family's health but for the health of our community. Those responsibilities don't include

waiving our personal and constitutional rights to religious freedom and informed consent.  
Please vote no on HB 6423 and SB 568.

**Melissa Uriarte:**

I am here in opposition of HB 6423 because it will take away my children's right to an education and would negatively impact our lives in several areas. My family would be faced with the possibility of having to move out of state to somewhere that protects and values our rights as American citizens.

Please do not pass this bill.

**Reported by: Beverley Henry**

**Date: April 23, 2021**