



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director of Education Reform Now CT
February 16, 2022**

Re: H.B. No. 6423, An Act Concerning Immunizations

Co-Chairs Abrams and Steinberg, Vice-Chairs Anwar, Kushner, and Gilchrest, Ranking Members Hwang, Somers, and Petit, and Members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 6423.

It has never been clearer that safe and healthy classrooms are a precondition of learning. Parents rightfully expect that when they drop their children off at public school, their kids and teachers will be safe from preventable diseases.

Pre-pandemic, the 2018-19 school-level data released by the state showed that a shocking 134 Connecticut schools fall below federal guidelines for establishing herd immunity—and in 2019, Connecticut was one of a handful of states to see incidences of measles. When we don't vaccinate enough of our population, we expose our children—and especially children who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons—to communicable diseases and dangerous illnesses.

Currently, Connecticut parents have two methods by which to exempt their children from vaccination: (1) for medical conditions that are contraindicated; and (2) through claims of religious exemption. Since 2012, as vaccination levels for kindergarteners have dropped, religious exemptions have also increased at the same rate. In other words, there's a clear correlation between religious exemptions and reduced vaccination levels. These numbers also coincided with the 2019 incidences of measles in Connecticut.

Importantly, the vast majority of Connecticut families agree with a commonsense vaccination policy for public schools. 95% of Connecticut parents already comply with vaccination guidelines.

Like speed limits and bans on smoking in public places, this legislation will shield the general public from harm. **However, while we see this as a significant improvement from the 2020 legislation, we oppose subsection (b), which effectively "grandfathers in" seventh through twelfth graders whose parents or guardians have personal or religious objections to vaccination. An extended phase-in is a compromise that still leaves many students unnecessarily vulnerable.** No parent who opts his or her student into a publicly offered educational experience should be above these rules. The medical community has a clear consensus that students are safer and healthier when they are vaccinated, and the needs of the community at large therefore have to outweigh the personal priorities of other individuals.

That is why we support this bill, and we are grateful to the legislators who have drafted it, for carefully balancing important personal freedoms with the safety of the greater community.

Connecticut families have a right to know that when their children attend our schools—especially our public ones—they are safe from the spread of dangerous and preventable diseases. They trust that you, the legislature, will protect Connecticut's youngest citizens, and so do I.