

March 11, 2026

**Testimony of Peter Wolfgang, President,
Family Institute of Connecticut Action in
opposition to SB450, AN ACT CONCERNING
THE STANDARD OF CARE FOR
IMMUNIZATION.**



I submit this testimony in opposition to **Section 13 of SB 450**, which proposes changes that would weaken Connecticut's Religious Freedom Restoration Act, found in **C.G.S. § 52-571b**.

Connecticut's RFRA is one of the most important civil liberties protections in our state law. It ensures that when the government burdens a person's exercise of religion—even through a law that applies generally—the state must meet the highest legal standard. The government must show that the burden serves a **compelling governmental interest** and that it is using the **least restrictive means** to achieve that interest.

That standard reflects a long tradition in American law recognizing religious liberty as a fundamental right.

The history of Connecticut's RFRA shows that the legislature adopted this protection very deliberately.

In 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court decided **Employment Division v. Smith**, which held that neutral laws could burden religious exercise without strict scrutiny. That decision caused widespread concern that religious liberty protections had been weakened.

In response, Congress passed the **federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993**, restoring the compelling-interest test that had existed in earlier Supreme Court decisions like **Sherbert v. Verner** and **Wisconsin v. Yoder**.

When the Supreme Court later ruled in **City of Boerne v. Flores** that the federal RFRA applied only to the federal government, many states—including Connecticut—adopted their own statutes.

Connecticut enacted **C.G.S. § 52-571b** specifically to preserve strong protections for the free exercise of religion under state law. The legislature's intent was clear: to provide **broad and durable protection against unnecessary government interference with religious exercise**, even when a burden results from a rule of general applicability.

In other words, RFRA was designed to be a strong safeguard for religious liberty—not a narrow or easily bypassed protection.

That is why **Section 13 of SB 450 raises serious concerns.**

Changing Connecticut's RFRA while religious liberty claims are actively being litigated in court risks creating the perception that the legislature is attempting to influence the outcome of a particular case rather than setting neutral policy.

Regardless of one's views about the underlying dispute, weakening a core civil liberty statute in order to secure a litigation advantage should give lawmakers pause.

Religious liberty is not a partisan issue. The protections in Connecticut's RFRA apply to **every faith community and every individual believer**—from churches and synagogues to faith-based ministries and individual citizens seeking to live according to their beliefs. These protections also safeguard **minority faiths**, which often depend most on strong legal protections.

And it is important to remember that RFRA does not give anyone a free pass to ignore the law. It simply requires the government to justify burdens on religious exercise under the strict scrutiny standard—a standard courts have applied for decades.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **remove Section 13 from SB 450** and preserve Connecticut's Religious Freedom Restoration Act as it currently stands.