



Connecticut Department of Public Health

Testimony Presented Before the Committee On Children

February 7, 2019

**Commissioner Raul Pino, M.D., M.P.H.
860-509-7101**

House Bill 7005 - An Act Prohibiting The Acknowledgment Of Parental Statements Concerning Religious Objections To Vaccination By School Nurses And Permitting Members Of The Clergy To Acknowledge Such Statements.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) supports House Bill 7005, which would permit ordained, commissioned and licensed members of the clergy to acknowledge parental statements concerning religious objections to vaccinations required for enrollment in public schools under the jurisdiction of local and regional boards of education and nonpublic schools, and remove the requirement for school nurses to acknowledge such statements. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

School nurses are in place to support the health needs of the individual student, as well as the student body population. Most often it is the school nurse that ensures children are up to date on required immunizations for school attendance or have a religious or medical exemption on file with the school. A religious exemption is a signed statement by the parent or guardian of a child that states that immunizations are contrary to their religious beliefs. Current statute mandates the religious statement be acknowledged by the following individuals: a judge of a court of record or a family support magistrate; a clerk or deputy clerk of a court having a seal; a town clerk; a notary public; a justice of the peace; an attorney admitted to the bar of this state; or a school nurse.

The inclusion of school nurses in the list of persons that acknowledge a religious exemption statement may place nurses in a tenuous position, in that they are required to validate that the exemption meets the legal criteria. A school nurse is supposed to protect the health, safety and welfare of the student body as a whole. Parents may have easier access to a school nurse than any of the other individuals, which could conceivably lead to more children in the school with such exemptions. The more exempt children in a school, the greater the risk for outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases.

Lastly, an ordained, commissioned or licensed member of the clergy is the most qualified individual to acknowledge a parental statement concerning religious objections to vaccines.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.