

February 18, 2020

Testimony regarding HB 5044 An Act Concerning Immunizations

To the Distinguished Co-Chairs and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

The Connecticut Association of Directors of Health (CADH) is a nonprofit organization comprised of the Directors of Connecticut's local health departments and districts. Local health directors are the statutory agents of the Commissioner of Public Health and are critical providers of essential public health services at the local level in Connecticut.

As leaders of public health in our towns and cities, we support the elimination of religious exemptions for vaccination for school attendance. Vaccines are among the top ten public health achievements of the 20th century. They save and improve lives while also reducing hospitalizations and associated health care costs. A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the following:

- At the beginning of the 20th century, an average of 48,164 people in the United States were infected each year with **smallpox** and about 1,528 deaths occurred. Smallpox has been eradicated worldwide because of vaccines.
- **Polio** was once one of the most feared diseases in the U.S. In the early 1950s, it caused more than 15,000 cases of paralysis each year. Thanks to the polio vaccine, dedicated health care professionals, and parents who vaccinate their children on schedule, polio has been eliminated in this country for more than 30 years.
- Just prior to the licensing of the **measles** (MMR) vaccine in 1963, an average of 503,282 cases and 432 measles-associated deaths in the US were reported each year.
- MMR vaccine has resulted in the complete elimination of maternal **rubella** and its devastating effects of congenital blindness and fetal anomalies.

In 2019, there were 1282 measles cases reported in the US, the greatest number reported since 1992. Measles is highly infectious and is likely to cause outbreaks in communities that have not achieved a high vaccination rate. Based on 2018-2019 school immunization data, there are over 100 schools in Connecticut that fell below the recommended herd immunity rate of 95% for measles. As such, those communities are at risk for measles outbreaks.

We in the U.S. are fortunate to live in a time where infectious diseases are not widely prevalent in our local communities. The mission of CADH is to support the continued maintenance and improvement of good public health practice. Widespread exemptions from vaccination put the general population at risk, especially school-aged children, and represent a potentially dangerous trend. It is time to respond to the public health risk evidenced by data showing increasing numbers of cases of vaccine preventable diseases and eliminate the religious exemption for vaccinations.

Respectfully Submitted by the CADH Board of Directors