

Dear Senators and Representatives,

I am writing today to oppose the amendment/bill to remove the religious exemption in our state of CT and to ask you to vote NO to the passing of such amendment/bill.

Recently released numbers by the Department of Public Health are inaccurate and have been confirmed by multiple superintendents and many districts pointing out errors. Our numbers of exemptions are still actually low, with only approximately 10% reporting higher rates of exemptions in smaller population towns with lower population class sizes; like Montessori schools and the Waldorf School. This data will skew percentages making them appear to be higher and is not an accurate indication of a problem with our religious exemption.

The Department of Public Health has stated that our state is not in a public health emergency. There are 6.5 million people in CT, 1/2 a million of which are school aged children. Approximately 1,300 of those 1/2 million obtain religious exemptions from vaccines in the state. Herd immunity cannot exist. There is about a 98% vaccination rate of school aged children, and millions of adults who are not vaccinated and we do not have an outbreak of any childhood virus for which there are vaccines for. There were 3 cases of measles presented in the state this year, all of which were adults, not unvaccinated children. If you want to address a public health crisis that doesn't even exist yet, than do just that. Altering a religious exemption in our state or even removing it is not going to change our state of public health. It's not going to prevent future measles cases being presented in our state. You can address public health without changing the religious exemption.

The current law is working as we speak today. Amending a bill to add the removal of the religious exemption, is going to allow the state to keep healthy unvaccinated children out of school. The schools for which parents pay town taxes that fund the public schools for the towns we live in. Should this bill pass, these towns should have to pay back taxes to parents who's unvaccinated children are no longer able to attend school. Arguments exists that with the removal of the religious exemption, there is avoidance of forced vaccination. That parents can just homeschool their children. The fact of the matter is that the government is not going to stop at the removal of the religious exemption. You may be removing unvaccinated children out of schools by passing such a bill, but you're not removing them from our state. So how does that change the public health of our state? It doesn't! All it does is place financial stress on parents who need a dual income to financially be able to live in this state, own a house and a car and pay taxes. If you think removing the religious exemption is protecting children, especially immunocompromised children, you are wrong.

Severely immunocompromised children can't attend schools due to the weakened state of their immune systems. This makes them so susceptible to any small pathogen that would normally give a child or adult a small cold. Unvaccinated children pose no greater risk of harming an immunocompromised child than the environment of a class room, a child recently vaccinated with a live virus like MMR or Varicella, or an adult parent or teacher who hasn't received all of their vaccinations.

This Amendment/Bill has not brought due process through the legislative process, and has gone against all of the rules sworn to be upheld by the legislators who began this movement. This amendment/Bill is far more than just that. It is a battle for a victory fought with little integrity and thought for those whom this bill directly affects. It is a discriminatory act that strips CT residents of their deeply held religious beliefs that need no explanation at all. The separation of church and state was brought before our country for a reason. Government should not dictate religious practice.

This is not a movement of being for or against vaccines. It is a movement that should allow parents the right to choose or deny a medical procedure being performed on their child. They should be allowed to make an educated decision based on unbiased scientific research, not forced to conform to what medical doctors and researchers say is safe. The state should not be allowed to take away the right to public education for a child because their parents deem a medical procedure a violation of their religious practice.

I ask you to please vote NO to the amendment/bill asking to remove the religious exemption in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Melissa Tulisano
Newington, CT