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Greetings, Sens. Duff and Slap, Reps. Ritter, Steinberg, and Linehan. I would like to testify in the strongest possible manner my support for the removal of the religious exemption for childhood immunizations. The only exemptions there should be to vaccines should be medical exemptions, i.e. those who are too young to receive vaccines or otherwise have severe allergic reactions to ingredients in the vaccines. Currently, in the USA, we are seeing a resurgence of preventable diseases that were all but eliminated from the US a couple of decades ago or so. Removing the religious exemption would help to eradicate these diseases by building up the herd immunity that is supposed to exist from receiving these vaccinations.

First of all, I would like to preface my support for the removal of the religious exemption with this: no major religion has objection to the administering of vaccines. In my research, I have found only two potential religions that only might have an objection to the administering of vaccines: the Church of Christ, Scientist; and the Dutch Reformed Church. In the case of the former, the founder of the religion, Mary Baker Eddy, has stated that "Rather than quarrel over vaccination, I recommend, if the law demand, that an individual submit to this process, that he obey the law, and then appeal to the gospel to save him from bad physical results." In the case of the latter, it seems to just have been a fear of adverse effects; it only led to an outbreak of measles in a Dutch community in 2013, where more than 1200 individuals were infected with the disease. As a result, it appears some subsets of the religion might be more accepting of vaccines. Regardless, neither religion has much, if any, presence in the state of Connecticut [no disrespect meant to the few practitioners that do exist here]. Some religions that are more widely practiced in Connecticut may express concerns with vaccines, but strongly feel the benefits of receiving them far outweigh the risks. For example, despite having concerns that some vaccines may have been developed using cells of aborted fetuses [such as the rubella vaccine], the Roman Catholic Church outright states that in the absence of a vaccine that hasn't been developed in this manner, that the benefits of the vaccine in regards to the health of oneself and the health of the community are far more important.

Second, I would like to take issue with the religious objection form offered by the state of Connecticut. I understand there was a hearing on a bill to remove school nurses while adding religious clergy to the form. Frankly, if there was a true religious exemption, none of the officials currently listed on the form are religious authority, and adding religious clergy might be a good thing. However, as I've previously stated, no major religion has objections to vaccines that would stop their administering. With the lax oversight presented on the form, coupled with no requirement that any religious authority signs off on it, a parent or guardian doesn't even need to practice a religion to get the form approved, essentially making the form function as a de facto philosophical/personal belief exemption, which is an exemption currently prohibited under state law. How would it be a religious exemption if neither party has to prove a religious exemption, and just simply check off the right boxes and fill in names?

This brings me to my next point, which involves parental rights. Some say that the religious exemption shouldn't be removed because it interferes with parental rights. However, that is a dangerous mindset to take. For one, if parental rights was the issue, then it wouldn't be a religious exemption to begin with, but a personal exemption. Second, parents do not have the right to put their children or any other children in harm's way. Aside from cases where a child can't receive vaccinations for medical reasons [which, again, should be the only vaccine exemptions], there has been more than enough evidence provided by the scientific community proving that vaccines are safe for the general population to receive. Any criticism of vaccines beyond these medical reasons just amounts to scare tactics, because the science just doesn't back up their claims. I won't get into the claims here, because I do not intend for this testimony to just be a document debunking said claims. Regardless, by choosing not to vaccinate their child, parents who do not have legitimate medical claims are essentially putting their children in harm's way. If those unvaccinated children come into contact with other unvaccinated children, and assuming one of those children has a vaccine-preventable disease, it just opens the door to a major outbreak, exacerbating the problem at hand.

Thanks for reading this testimony in support of the removal of the religious exemption against vaccines.

Sincerely,  
Steven Erlingheuser