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# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Beth Bye  
*Commissioner*

**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner  
Office of Early Childhood  
Before the Public Health Committee  
H.B. 5044 – An Act Concerning Immunizations  
Wednesday, February 19, 2020**

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Good morning Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. Thank you giving me the opportunity today to testify in strong support of H.B. 5044 – An Act Concerning Immunizations.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety and learning outcomes for young children. Through our programs, we support infant and toddler care, preschool, after-school care, child care and youth camp licensing, home visiting, and early intervention to address developmental delays. The Office of Early Childhood is working toward better coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and families.

The Office of Early Childhood is the agency responsible for licensing of child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes, and youth camps throughout Connecticut. More than 4,000 child care programs are licensed by the agency. Our licensing specialists conduct unannounced licensing inspections at least once annually and follow-up on those visits as necessary. The statutes and regulations which govern licensing establish the minimum health and safety requirements that programs must meet and are designed to protect the health, safety and well-being of participating children.

Today, I am speaking to sections of H.B. 5044 that are relevant to child care licensing. Section 5 of the bill seeks to repeal the religious exemption for immunizations for licensed care centers and group child care homes in Sec. 19a-79(a). We support the repeal of this religious exemption. We also recommend that the religious exemption for immunizations be repealed for licensed family child care homes in Sec. 19a-87b(f). This change can be made in Section 8 of the bill.

As the Governor and Commissioner of Public Health have stated publicly many times, a high vaccination rate protects not only vaccinated children but also those who cannot or have not been yet vaccinated. High vaccination rates are not only critical for medically fragile children but also to our youngest babies who have not received their full round of vaccines. Our youngest children, particularly our infants, are the most vulnerable to disease outbreaks because their

immune system is not yet fully developed. Our child care programs depend upon herd immunity. We must support policy change to maintain a high vaccination rate that prevent infection diseases from gaining ground and to keep our youngest children healthy and safe.

I also respectfully request that Section 7 of the bill include the Office of Early Childhood as a member of the Advisory Committee on Medically Contraindicated Vaccinations. The child care licensing statutes allow for an exemption for children for whom immunization is medically contraindicated. Our agency has two deeply informed nurses on staff who could contribute their knowledge and expertise to this Advisory Committee.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer your questions now and/or at a later date. The Office of Early Childhood is committed to work together – with legislators, the executive branch, providers, advocates and parents - to better serve our families with young children.