



State of Connecticut
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

February 22, 2021

The Honorable Ned Lamont
State Capitol
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford CT, 06106

Dear Governor Lamont:

On behalf of the Republican members of the Public Health Committee, we were disappointed to learn that the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the State Department of Education (SDE) did not testify in person at a recent Public Health Committee hearing, since we believe members on both sides of the aisle would have benefited greatly by having some of their concerns and questions answered.

While we greatly appreciated the submission of written testimony from DPH, we were disappointed in a lack of any testimony from SDE. Since we are currently without an education commissioner, and only have an interim commissioner of public health, we are directing this to your office in the hope that you'll be able to forward this to the appropriate agency staff for responses to our questions.

As you are aware, the Public Health Committee held a public hearing on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. live, via zoom. The two bills on the agenda, *House Bill 6423, An Act Concerning Immunizations*, and *Senate Bill 568, An Act Eliminating the Nonmedical Exemption to the Immunization Requirement*, were heard by the Committee for twenty-four hours straight, and adjourned on Wednesday, February 16 at 9:00 in the morning.

These two bills represent arguably the most contentious bills heard at the Capitol in 30+ years. Nearly 2,000 constituents signed up to testify and over 3,500 pieces of written testimony were submitted to the Committee for consideration. Throughout all of this, the DPH recently released updated vaccine statistics and published the 2019-20 data showing that vaccination rates stabilized or even improved slightly with rates over 95% for measles.

Many members of our respective caucuses were looking forward to discussing the ramifications of these bills with you during the public hearing, especially the impact on the children of Connecticut who may be unable to remain in school if the religious exemption to vaccination is removed, as these bills require. We appreciate your time and consideration in reviewing and responding to the questions below.

1. Kindly provide data that includes the percentage of noncompliant students per school, along with the current percentage claiming religious exemption per school so we can understand the number of children that have no paperwork.
2. Provide the number of noncompliant students in each school in the same manner to those that claim an exemption are included.
3. Given that the vaccination numbers have improved at the kindergarten level and not at the 7th grade level – suggesting a bubble moving through the system – on what basis should we be removing children k-7 from school?
4. If this legislation moves forward and unvaccinated children are required to distance learn as an alternative to in-person learning in the classroom, what would the SDE plan be to provide services for children with 504s and IEPs?
5. In light of the governor's position encouraging education rather than mandating the COVID vaccination, does the SDE feel that an education policy is more important to pursue rather than these punitive measures to remove a child from school?
6. What would the SDE plan be for providing virtual learning for unvaccinated children in Connecticut? Would the curriculum be offered at the state level or would each district be responsible for educating these children?
7. Given the governor's effort to educate and encourage volunteer vaccination during the COVID crisis, does the DPH believe that a more robust informed consultation paid for through insurance via the pediatrician would be the best way to reduce noncompliance and people claiming the religious exemption?
8. What is the total number of noncompliant children statewide?
9. Could the DPH please provide a trendline over the last 10 years of noncompliant children comparable to the trendline given for religious exemption and nonreligious exemption?
10. Would the DPH endorse sanctioning school nurses and districts for failing to collect all vaccine paperwork from students at schools?

11. The data for vaccinations is only captured at the beginning of kindergarten and the beginning of 7th grade. Given that, does the DPH believe that it would be more statistically accurate to have the schools report the data annually for each grade or provide a mechanism for them to update student data on a rolling basis?
12. Given that the data is reported as a snapshot in time, does the department believe it would be beneficial to have a mechanism for schools to update their vaccination data as students come into compliance?
13. What is your working hypothesis for why removing the religious exemption is necessary now, and what is DPH basing this on?
14. What is the expected impact on vaccination rates if these bills are signed into law? Does DPH expect it to increase? Will those who refuse vaccination continue to be counted if they remain in the state?
15. Did you consider less onerous alternatives such as vaccine education by DPH, and if not, why not?
16. Did you explore ideas for broadening medical exemptions under DPH and if not, why not?
17. On what scientific basis does DPH and SDE not require documentation that all teachers and staff at the schools are also fully vaccinated?
18. Can the DPH provide any data or evidence showing how many unvaccinated children have transmitted one of these conditions to others in the community?
19. What is SDE's plan for how individual schools will handle the data they receive from DPH, especially in cases where reports are incomplete?
20. What is SDE's plan for ensuring that those who refuse to vaccinate their children, and seek schooling elsewhere, are appropriately educated?
21. It appears the data collected by DPH's school survey is not necessarily accurate. It is imperative to have the micro data on vaccines - For example if a child has a religious exemption to one vaccine out of the vaccine schedule they are counted at "unvaccinated" when truly they should be considered "undervaccinated" - Is there a way for DPH to provide the detail by vaccine type as to who is missing what?
22. What are the vaccines that children are failing to receive, and can DPH please provide this information? Is it the MMR? is it Hep B or A? If we had this data, wouldn't it be

more prudent to have an educational push on the problem vaccine rather than displacing children?

23. What is the school expulsion process to remove a child from school with a religious exemption by SDE? Who bears the cost of court fees in an expulsion hearing - the municipality or the state?
24. How will SDE address the way in which ECS is impacted by towns for the removal of students with a religious exemption, and those who are non-compliant?
25. How will SDE address the issue of equity and justice if it is found that black and brown children are more directly impacted and forced out of school than their white counterparts?
26. Will SDE's teacher evaluations change for those who are required to teach remotely children that are now forced to learn from home due to their religious beliefs?
27. If it is currently stated by the CDC that schools are one of the most safe environments with the risk mitigation that has occurred via COVID, can DPH address how removing children with a religious exemption increases safety if these same children are still at the public library, at the parks, grocery store etc?
28. Does the DPH Commissioner plan on adding COVID 19 to the list of required vaccines if it is granted an EUA by the FDA on children, and will a COVID vaccines be required for CT children to enter school this fall?
29. If increased vaccinations is truly the goal, would DPH be willing to fund vaccination clinics at schools through the school nurse and/or school based health clinics?
30. How does removing children with a religious exemption actually increase the vaccination rate, and can DPH please help answer this?
31. Would SDE and DPH consider a standard form or method of record keeping for school nurses and increase funding to keep records up to date on vaccinations?

We thank for you for your time and attention to this matter and look forward to receiving and discussing your responses to these our questions. Since the bills are being moved with urgency through the committee process, we would greatly appreciate a quick response.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of William A. Petit Jr. in blue ink.

William A. Petit Jr. MD, 22nd Assembly District
House Ranking Member, Public Health

Handwritten signature of Heather Somers in black ink.

Heather Somers, 18th Senate District
Senate Ranking Member, Public Health

Handwritten signature of Tony Hwang in black ink.

Tony Hwang, 28th Senate District
Senate Ranking Member, Public Health