Bill Would Remove Written Consent From HIV Testing in RI

March 30, 2009

An amendment that would broaden HIV/AIDS testing in Rhode Island by removing written consent was met with both support and opposition from the state's medical community at a hearing before the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare, *The Providence Journal* reports.

According to the article, the current state law requires doctors to obtain written consent before testing a patient for HIV. The law was originally amended two years ago to exclude pregnant women who are now screened unless they sign a form to "opt out" of testing. The proposed House legislation—cosponsored by Joseph McNamara (D–Warwick), chairman of the House panel, and Representative Donna Walsh (D–Charlestown)—would extend testing to everyone.

Opponents of the amendment include the Rhode Island Affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Bennett H. Klein, the AIDS Law Project director for the Boston-based Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, who argue that the bill would make it easier for doctors to test patients without their knowledge. Supporters disagree, contending that informed consent will still be necessary.

"Please don't let the ACLU set the laws in this state," Timothy Flanigan, MD, head of the infectious disease program at Brown University, urged the House panel. "Don't delay this another year."

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