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Dear State Senator and State Representative:

For more than 31 years, I have been an ordained cleric in the Christian faith and a Human Rights activist. I've traveled to 61 countries and have witnessed some of the worst living conditions and treatment of humans ever seen, most of which were caused either directly or indirectly by government decisions. Of the myriad of injustices that I've witnessed in sub-Saharan Africa, in China and parts of Colombia, I am most bothered by the blatant disregard and neglect that I have recently seen by the proposed Connecticut legislation, HB 5044. This bill will cause harm to many children and families in general, and the greatest extent, in children and families of color.

For more than 400 hundred years, our nation has led the charge in our world regarding oppressing, terrorizing, dehumanizing, persecuting and murdering people of color, often without recourse or any sense of responsibility or remorse. Many of these heinous acts have been disguised as experiments in favor of Black people. Such was the case of the Tuskegee Experiment, which began in 1932, at a time when there was no known treatment for syphilis. These 600 men, mostly sharecroppers and many who had never visited a doctor before, were enrolled in the project with the promise of free medical care, meals, and burial insurance.

Of the 600 black men, 399 had latent syphilis, and 201 were disease-free at the beginning of the experiment. The U.S. Department of Public Health demanded that the coerced participants not be treated with penicillin but instead gave them placebos such as aspirin and mineral supplements. To track the disease's full progression, researchers provided no care for the men as they were rapidly dying. Many of the men went blind; some went insane. Most of the men experienced severe health problems as a result of this awful, inhumane, government-sanctioned experiment. What the government promised would only last for six months turned into 40 years, ending only in 1972, long after appropriate treatment was known. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention intentionally and knowingly caused the death and harm of thousands of black lives. Yet these uninformed, unlearned black men trusted the government's word simply because some men in white coats said it was safe.

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On May 16, 1997, former President Bill Clinton issued a formal apology for the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, stating that it was the "longest nontherapeutic experiment on human beings" in the history of medicine and public health. In the same way, we have now come to yet another experiment, except this time, it doesn't even disguise itself as a study. However, using oddly similar language, this bill HB5044, denies a religious exemption to "Untreated" or "Unvaccinated" Children, whether they be Caucasian, African-American and, children of the African diaspora, Latinos, Indigenous and Native Americans or Asians. Our nation has, for hundreds of years, denied the effects, trauma, and aftermath of slavery, which has disadvantaged black people in many ways, some in perpetuity.

In 1860, there were nearly 4 million Black enslaved humans under another government-approved law in the U.S., yet the total population was only 31 million. Until this day, there has never been a Congressional apology for such an atrocity. Yet, instead, black people have endured continuous demonstrations aiming toward annihilation and black genocide through the efforts of Jim Crow laws, resistance against Civil Rights, mass incarceration, and lynching, much of which has recently resurfaced at an alarming rate.

Recently, I have heard several Democratic State Representatives publicly argue that vaccines are safe for children while the data proves otherwise. This endorsement of vaccinations, in a society where there is no threat of a deadly outbreak, leads me to believe that there is a concealed, mutually exclusive benefit for the politicians who are fighting so hard for this bill to be passed and ignoring the potential negative ramifications. Also, I am deeply concerned with a Public Health Committee, on which not one Black person serves, despite the large Black and Latino population in the state of Connecticut. Despite constant denial from elected officials, the evidence of the harm that vaccines have caused and continue to produce has been clearly stated and made available to the public.

As of the writing of this letter, and according to the Health Resources and Service Administration, "Since 1988, over 21,585 petitions have been filed with the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. Over that 30-year time period, 18,533 petitions have been adjudicated, with 7,090 of those determined to be compensable, while 11,443 were dismissed. Total compensation paid over the life of the program is approximately \$4.2 billion." This is precise data that proves that while vaccines may work for some, they certainly do not work for all. Of all who stand to lose from vaccines, Black people, and particularly males, may be first in line. Yet bill proponents continue to say that vaccines are safe and that they are the best option for a healthy society.

In 2014, Lead CDC Researcher Dr. William Thompson admitted to hiding results that proved the Measles Mumps Rubella vaccine caused significantly higher autism rates among Black boys. The study found that African American boys statistically had a significantly higher likelihood of being harmed by the MMR vaccine than their White counterparts. Today, Dr. Thompson is under Whistleblower Protection. The findings from this research were destroyed; he alone saved the study to testify to its veracity. Congress has not allowed him to come forward with the truth. Honestly, and quite to the point, what is happening is not anything new, but rather a convenient measure to once again blatantly disregard every documented fact concerning the potential harm of vaccines, particularly since its most significant effects harm Black and Latino males.

While the effects may have their most significant negative impact on children of color, Caucasian children are far from exempt and will be significantly harmed as well. As a person of faith and an Ambassador for improving the human condition, I urge you to abolish your plans to promote forced vaccinations and commit to other orders of business that will help to improve our lives rather than improve the profits for pharmaceutical companies and its many shareholders. People of color have never historically been a topic of high priority in our country or even within the various states that comprise our country. Connecticut has the opportunity to change this narrative by leading a national effort in which people, not profits or propaganda, matter most.

Finally, I would like to call your attention to the issue of religious exemption. The Church and its members are not bound by any law that stands in direct contradiction to God's law. Hypothetically speaking, if our government forced its citizens to kill innocent people or to cause harm to children, the Church's stand would immediately oppose that directive as it contradicts what we believe is God's law. Connecticut has entered on a perilous course by elevating itself as an authority over the one separate entity that has remained different for obvious reasons—The Church.

The Seminole Tribe built the first casino on an Indian reservation in 1979 in Florida. Before acknowledging the sovereignty of the land of Indigenous people, they were still sovereign citizens. They didn't need approval or sanction from the government. In a far more significant manner, the Church never has and never will need any local or national government sanction or interpretation in any way to carry out its edicts, as those charges are given to us by and from our Creator. Whether or not the State Legislature is successful in carrying out a religious exemption revocation is utterly irrelevant to the Church's charge and calling.

I have been approached by various State Representatives who have argued that they have spoken to other church leaders and concluded that the churches do not all have the same convictions concerning vaccinations. That may be true. But it is an irrelevant point. My job as a cleric is not to prove how people of varying faiths agree on matters but rather to make clear to you that if any bill is passed that does not represent the people it serves with the truth, that it is against the position of our Creator, on whose side we stand. My concern is not about convincing leaders of faith to live out their calling with conviction. Every person will live out his or her conviction according to spiritual alignment with God. That is a very personal issue.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution articulates: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." The very idea of revoking an innate religious right stands in diametric opposition to our very First Amendment and the values on which our country was founded.

I urge that for the sake of what is right and for the sake of the lives of the children that you serve, please refrain from forced vaccinations. Please do not attempt to force those who believe otherwise to compromise their positions of faith.

Sincerely,

Dr. Aaron Lewis