

## DO NOT SUPPORT A1931/S1147

***A1931/S1147 seeks to significantly restrict the religious exemption to vaccination in New Jersey by adding new requirements to make it more difficult to file an exemption.***

**We strongly oppose A1931/S1147** because it will severely infringe upon religious freedoms and rights, impose hardships for families and the state, create educational and constitutional violations and discriminate against those with less education and less wealth.

**Religious Rights** Who will decide what constitutes a bona fide religious belief? How can government decide whether citizen's religious beliefs are sincere? What criteria will be used to judge if religious beliefs are acceptable?

**NJ has compulsory education laws.** What state authority will review exemptions and when? Will authorities across the state coordinate with one another to be consistent or will they have autonomy to interpret as they see fit? What happens if the beliefs in the exemption are found to be unacceptable? What will the penalty be? Will children be removed from school? Will parents be held in contempt of the law? Will there be an appeals process? What about children with special needs who are entitled to services? How many students will be denied the right to a free public education because their religious beliefs don't line up with the state's interpretation of religion?

**Privacy and The Constitution** The NJ Constitution and the United States Constitution provide for the freedom of religion. The state and school boards will open themselves up to lawsuits if this bill passes. Why would the state require citizens to reveal personal religious and parental matters to notaries and state authorities? The very concept of requiring parents to state deeply personal religious beliefs for scrutiny by school districts and the state is repugnant.

**The bill is technically confusing and discriminatory.** It has the potential to discriminate against citizens for whom English is not their first language and citizens who may not have the educational background to grasp what is at stake. What efforts and resources will be allocated to address this? This bill will disproportionately affect segments of the population. What about citizens without the financial means or time off from work to seek legal counsel in order to satisfy the requirements? What happens to families without resources to do this?

The current religious exemption statute is sufficient and working as intended. In 2008, a Health Department memo adopted a change in guidelines to correct the non-uniformity, harassment, intimidation and discrimination that parents had been facing for several years. **"NJDHSS hopes that the information provided will enable schools, child care facilities and local health departments to process requests for exemptions in a more uniform and expeditious manner."** This is now occurring and needs no alteration.

Passing this bill **will not** force more people to vaccinate and it **will not** change people's religious beliefs. **But it will** create a **cumbersome, discriminatory** process which will **trample on the religious and constitutional rights** and **privacy** of the citizens of New Jersey.

**Please VOTE NO or ABSTAIN on A1931/S1147**