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HB 17-1320 is a THREAT to ALL Children

Honorable Legislators,

The American College of Pediatricians, the American Association of Physicians and Surgeons, the Christian Medical and Dental Associations, and the Catholic Medical Association, promote health policy rooted in the best available science and the Hippocratic medical ethic. Together we represent over 20,000 healthcare professionals who urge you to REJECT HB 17-1320.

Shakespeare wrote, "I would there were no age between ten and three and twenty... For there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting." (*The Winter's Tale*, Act III, Sc. iii) It is amazing that over 400 years later, scientists are confirming Shakespeare's observation that the adolescent's brain is not fully mature until approximately 23 – 25 years of age leaving them prone to emotional instability and making rash decisions. New and ongoing scientific research, utilizing functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), demonstrates that during adolescence nearly every aspect of the brain is undergoing dramatic changes.

The frontal lobe, the judgment center or CEO of the brain, allows the individual to contemplate and plan actions, to evaluate consequences of behaviors, to assess risk, and to think strategically. It is also the "inhibition center" of the brain, discouraging the individual from acting impulsively. The frontal lobe ultimately develops connections to many other areas of the brain, so that experiences and emotions are processed through the judgment center. The frontal lobe does not fully mature until approximately 23 – 25 years of age.¹ The immaturity of the adolescent's judgment center explains much of the inability of adolescents to properly interpret experiences in the environment and thus make appropriate and healthy decisions.

Many other areas of the brain likewise are not completely myelinated until the early 20s. The amygdala, which is the emotion center of the brain, is immature in adolescents and not fully connected to the frontal lobe. Adolescents, then, may have a more difficult time interpreting their emotions, as well as the emotions of others.¹ More importantly, since the amygdala is poorly connected to the judgment center of the brain, the adolescent is more likely to make decisions based upon the emotional impact rather than upon logic. As Pustilnik and Henry state, "Executive function and emotional responses are not just less developed or different in teens: These two capacities are also less closely linked than in the typical adult brain. As a result, a teen may intellectually understand an issue and emotionally have a response to that issue, but those two processes may occur nearly in parallel rather than in dialogue. Emotional and executive functions must work together to bring about almost any kind of decision."²

Adolescents need the guidance of their parents and adult mentors of character to guide, advise and protect them. HB17-1320 is a THREAT to the health and well-being of all children.

Sincerely,

Michelle Cretella, MD, FCP
President

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REFERENCES

1. National Institute of Mental Health (2001). Teenage Brain: A work in progress. National Institute of Mental Health publication accessed March 22, 2011 at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/teenage-brain-a-work-in-progress-fact-sheet/index.shtml>.
2. Pustilnik AC, and Henry LM. Adolescent Medical Decision Making and the Law of the Horse *Journal of Health Care Law and Policy* 2012; 15:1-14. (U of Maryland Legal Studies Research Paper 2013-14).