

July 6, 2009

To: The Public Health Committee
Massachusetts State House
Boston, Massachusetts

We are writing today – collectively as a family - in strong support of the passing of Senate Bill #903 – which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

On November 20, 2008, we lost our daughter, sister, niece to melanoma. After three years aggressively fighting this deadly disease, Glenna Kohl – age 26 years – lost her battle. Glenna was a tanner throughout her teen and college years. Neither she, nor we, ever knew that using a tanning bed could be so harmful. She always believed, as so many young people do, that using a tanning bed was a good way to get a “base tan” before going out in the sun, so that you don’t burn. There were no warning pamphlets or preparatory videos to read and watch before using a tanning bed to warn you of what can happen. It took this awful disease and the important information that we learned from doctors and nurses over those three years to understand the real risks of “tanning.”

Tanning bed use leads to a potential serious health problem for teenagers and a real problem for your adults. Skin cancer, until recently was uncommon in this age group and is now routinely reported to our cancer registry. Intentional tanning either indoor or outdoors are the cause of this growing problem.

After Glenna was diagnosed and understood what she was facing, she worked hard – even through her treatments and illness – to speak to groups about the importance of sun and tanning safety. She became passionate about spreading the word to all young people, so that no one would have to go through what she was experiencing. We, as her family, will continue to work for her cause and try to do everything in our power to keep up her fight.

This legislation is a solid step in the right direction to preventing skin cancer. We plead with you to pass this bill on July 21st. We will be there in support and in anticipation of a positive outcome.

Thank you very much,

Colleen, Robert, Jeanne and Jacob Kohl
1153 Race Lane
Marstons Mills, MA 02648
508-428-1667
rckohl@comcast.net

In this brief statement, I will write about my own experiences with teenagers at Shrewsbury High School in and around the topic of tanning bed use. However, these experiences are not unique to me in any way, but are commonplace among any of my colleagues at Shrewsbury High School or any other high school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

As a high school teacher, I don't have to look far to see the effects of the abuse of tanning beds by young teenage girls. I go to work surrounded by 1700 teenagers each day. In my nine-year career, I have seen countless teenage girls (and occasionally boys) flock to tanning beds all year long without any idea of the implications to their health. The vast majority of these students are under the age of 18. As sophomores at the ages of 15 and 16, tanning becomes more and more popular as semi-formal dances, driving, and other rites of passage into adulthood rear their heads. Many girls display addictive tendencies, meeting in groups after school to go tanning, starting in the fall and going through the winter and into the spring, peaking during prom season. When I ask my classes every year, regardless of the grade level, how many students have a friend who uses a tanning bed several days a week (regardless of the time of year), nearly every girl raises her hand. There are even those who lie to their parents about going to a friend's house, but instead go to an indoor tanning facility.

As a parent, I find this behavior disturbing. As a biology teacher, I find the lack of knowledge about the dangers of UV radiation shocking. Every time the topic of skin cancer and tanning arises, I see girls with tanned faces undergo a noticeable change in eye contact or body language as if they feel foolish for tanning in the middle of January. But even though they may already know of the dangers, they continue to go tanning. A common belief I hear from many teenage girls is that if they do not get a sunburn no damage is being done. Therefore, if they continue to go tanning there is no need to worry about skin cancer since they have a good "base." Some students even went as far as to say that "tanning is good for you" and great for "*reducing* cancer risk" after hearing a news story about the beneficial aspects of *limited* UV exposure and vitamin D. Apparently the word *limited* did not have an impact.

There are some things that do have an impact, albeit limited in capacity. One of these is listening to a classmate tell of her experience of being diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma at the age of 14. This former student of mine pleaded with her classmates to avoid tanning beds at all cost. Many of the students in the class were taken aback as someone their own age described her personal experience with skin cancer. Unfortunately, this student discovered that the impact her story has is limited as most girls her age have the "it can't happen to me" attitude that many teenagers have when it comes to any risk-taking behavior. Two of the habitual tanners in that class told me in person that while the experience of their classmate was scary, they would continue to go tanning because they felt that the same thing could not happen to them since no one in their family had ever had skin cancer. Other students have said that they wouldn't worry about skin cancer unless it was melanoma, since the other types are less likely to spread.

Perhaps part of the reason for this attitude is due to the fact that the dangers of tanning beds are not as well publicized as the dangers of smoking and alcohol abuse. Those substances have laws regulating their use by those whom are underage. Even though these laws do not prevent all illegal use of tobacco and alcohol, they do help young people realize that these substances can be dangerous. Since tanning bed use does not have any strict regulations towards underage teens, many teenagers do not view tanning beds as a health risk.

Still there are other high school students who say that they are aware of the dangers, but going tanning makes them feel better, or it reduces facial acne. To them, those things are more important than the dangers they are facing. Being happy or having a clear complexion is more immediate and noticeable, while the damage that they incur while achieving these goals may go unseen for years. In addition to the darkening of the skin, these are two other popular reasons I hear time and time again as to why many of my students frequent tanning establishments. Again, the vast majority of these students are under the age of 18. In my professional estimation as an educator who works with teens on a daily basis, any type of law that would regulate the frequent use of tanning beds by teenagers under the age of 18 would be a great benefit to our youth. While it may not prevent all abuse of tanning beds, it would at the very least make it more difficult and deter habitual use in many instances, not to mention protecting the health of our young people.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey J. Mazza
117 Fort Meadow Drive
Hudson, MA 01749
jmazza@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us

To: The Public Health Committee

From: Beth Horne, 40 Cherry St, Gloucester, MA 01930, (978) 281-2519

As the mother of a young woman diagnosed with Melanoma at the age of 25, and again at 27, I strongly support Senate Bill # 903 which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

Tanning bed use leads to a potential serious health problem for teenagers and a real problem for your adults. Skin cancer, until recently was uncommon in this age group and is now routinely reported to our cancer registry. Intentional tanning either indoor or outdoors are the caused of this growing problem.

This legislation is a solid step in the right direction to preventing skin cancer. I urge you to pass this bill.

To: The Public Health Committee

From: Mike Horne, ,40 Cherry St, Gloucester, MA 01930, (978) 281-2519

As the father of a young woman diagnosed with Melanoma at the age of 25, and again at 27, I strongly support Senate Bill # 903 which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

Tanning bed use leads to a potential serious health problem for teenagers and a real problem for your adults. Skin cancer, until recently was uncommon in this age group and is now routinely reported to our cancer registry. Intentional tanning either indoor or outdoors are the caused of this growing problem.

This legislation is a solid step in the right direction to preventing skin cancer. I urge you to pass this bill.

To: The Public Health Committee

From: Brian Horne, 40 Cherry St, Gloucester, MA 01930, (978) 281-2519

As the brother of a young woman diagnosed with Melanoma at the age of 25, and again at 27, I strongly support Senate Bill # 903 which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

Tanning bed use leads to a potential serious health problem for teenagers and a real problem for your adults. Skin cancer, until recently was uncommon in this age group and is now routinely reported to our cancer registry. Intentional tanning either indoor or outdoors are the caused of this growing problem.

This legislation is a solid step in the right direction to preventing skin cancer. I urge you to pass this bill.

To: The Public Health Committee

From: Heather Fraelick, Age 28 – two time Melanoma survivor

695 Washington St, Gloucester, MA, (978) 879-4233

As a young woman diagnosed with Melanoma at the age of 25, and again at 27, I strongly support Senate Bill # 903 which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

Tanning bed use leads to a potential serious health problem for teenagers and a real problem for your adults. Skin cancer, until recently was uncommon in this age group and is now routinely reported to our cancer registry. Intentional tanning either indoor or outdoors are the caused of this growing problem.

This legislation is a solid step in the right direction to preventing skin cancer. I urge you to pass this bill.

To: The Public Health Committee

From: Richard Fraelick , 695 Washington St, Gloucester, MA, (978) 879-4233

As the husband of a young woman diagnosed with Melanoma at the age of 25, and again at 27, I strongly support Senate Bill # 903 which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

Tanning bed use leads to a potential serious health problem for teenagers and a real problem for your adults. Skin cancer, until recently was uncommon in this age group and is now routinely reported to our cancer registry. Intentional tanning either indoor or outdoors are the caused of this growing problem.

This legislation is a solid step in the right direction to preventing skin cancer. I urge you to pass this bill.

To: The Public Health Committee

From: Ethan Lerner, M.D.

I am a dermatologist who has seen patients for many years and in addition to running an academic laboratory. I strongly support Senate Bill # 903 which will restrict the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16 and require parental consent for those children between the ages of 16 and 18.

Tanning bed use has no benefits but can contribute to skin problems later in life.

This legislation is an excellent step in the right direction with respect to preventing skin cancer. I urge you to pass this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ethan A. Lerner".

Ethan A. Lerner, M.D.

Massachusetts General Hospital

Bldg 149, 13th Street

Charlestown, MA 02129