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Testimony of Martin Cohn, Associate Director Joint Committee on Public Health July 21, 2009

I am here today on behalf of the Massachusetts Academy of Dermatology, in support of S. 903, an act to further regulate sun tanning salons that is currently before the Joint Committee on Public Health.

The Massachusetts Academy of Dermatology is a professional association of close to 300 Massachusetts practicing dermatologists.

The medical profession and other concerned organizations and citizens have become increasingly concerned about the many hazardous effects of ultraviolet radiation including but not limited to skin cancer formation, premature aging of the skin, cataract formation and other eye damage including macular degeneration, tunnel vision and blindness, impairment of the immune system, photosensitizing reaction with various drugs, and initiation and or aggravation of certain diseases.

The FDA has ruled that tanning rays are carcinogenic agents whether the ultraviolet rays originate from a tanning parlor or from natural sunlight. However, tanning parlor rays penetrate deeper and do more harm than natural sunlight and for some tanning fanatics, tanning becomes addictive which then makes tanning even more hazardous.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) states that it takes only 20 minutes of tanning parlor ultraviolet light exposure to do the damage of five hours of natural sunlight ultraviolet light exposure.

People receive most of their dangerous lifetime exposure to ultraviolet radiation, that is tanning rays, before the age of 18 and numerous studies have established that skin cancer is closely associated with excessive ultraviolet light exposure before the age of 18. It is now estimated that at least 1 out of every children is destined to develop a skin cancer in their lifetime.

Twenty years ago there were about 500,000 cases of skin cancer diagnosed each year. Lately, there have been more than 1,000,000 new cases of skin cancer diagnosed each year and most of these skin cancers were preventable and represent about half of the more than 2 million total overall cancers of all organs diagnosed each year. It was estimated that in the year 2006 that there would be 1,300,000 new cases of skin cancer diagnosed.

The Massachusetts Academy of Dermatology, Massachusetts Medical Society, American Medical Association, American Academy of Dermatology and virtually every medical organization and physician is very much concerned about the skin cancer epidemic America is experiencing and the AAD has a goal of reducing the incidence of this skin cancer epidemic in the next 20 years.

Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, is now the second most common cancer in women ages 20 – 29. About 50+ years ago a person had a lifetime expectancy of about 1 in 1500 of developing a melanoma. Now, the incidence of melanoma lifetime expectancy is approaching 1 in 50.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently recommended that no one under the age of 18 use tanning beds and sun lamps. The American Medical Association urges all medical societies and physicians to educate their patients about the hazards of tanning and the EPA has developed a Sunwise School program to educate children about the hazards of tanning. The American Academy of Dermatology, American Cancer Society and Skin Cancer Foundation have long standing educational programs to prevent skin cancer.

Because of the increased knowledge and the awareness of the hazards of tanning parlor ultraviolet light exposure to children the Massachusetts Academy of Dermatology supports the enactment of state legislation to protect all minors from the hazards of tanning parlor rays by prohibiting the sale of tanning parlor ultraviolet rays to those 16 years of age or younger.

We feel that it is appropriate for legislation to be passed that would better protect our children, which are our most important assets and promote children's health and safety and reduce their future health care costs.

In addition to letters of support that we have gathered for this year's public hearing, I am giving you a copy of the testimony of Glenna Kohl given two years ago when this bill was discussed. Unfortunately, not only did the bill not make it out of committee but Glenna passed away In November, 2008.

Thank you for your consideration of passage of S. 903.