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Healthy People Build Strong Communities

Testimony by Dennis Kriesel with the Kansas Association of Local Health Departments (KALHD) to

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Written Opponent for SB 315 • March 21, 2023

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 315 which makes several changes to vaccine exemptions and requirements. KALHD is a nonprofit association dedicated to strengthening local health departments for the purpose of improving and protecting the health of all Kansans.

KALHD has multiple concerns with SB 315 and the negative impacts it could have:

- Section 1 modifies K.S.A. 2022 Supp. 44-663, shifting it from COVID-19 vaccine language to any vaccine in regards to the employer/employee relationship. This can be risky in the health-related fields where employees often work around and with immunocompromised individuals and certain vaccine requirements on staff help ensure the safety of clients.
- Section 2 modifies K.S.A. 65-508, installing a philosophical exemption to the religious exemption definition as it relates to child care facilities. KALHD stands in opposition to expanding allowable vaccine exemptions. We feel the existing exemptions are sufficient and additional ways to opt-out places society at risk of preventable diseases by dropping our herd immunity below adequate levels.
- Section 3 modifies K.S.A. 72-6262, essentially doing what Section 2 does but for school settings (and we oppose for the aforementioned reason).
- SB 315 also repeals K.S.A. 76-761a, the law that requires colleges/universities to have policies/procedures requiring all incoming students residing in student housing be vaccinated for meningitis. This change is extremely dangerous. The overall case-fatality ratio of meningococcal disease is 10-15% and as many as 20% of survivors have other impacts like limb loss, hearing loss, and neurologic damage¹.

KALHD sees no redeeming aspects in SB 315 and opposes it in totality. We believe this bill, if enacted into law, will result in additional deaths and morbidity for Kansans, all via diseases that are vaccine preventable. As such, we ask the committee to not recommend SB 315 favorably for passage.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dennis Kriesel

Executive Director, Kansas Association of Local Health Departments

¹ CDC data on meningitis and the case-fatality rate and other impacts can be found at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/mening.html#Clinical>