



House Committee on Health and Human Services

February 21, 2022

**Sarah Irsik-Good, Board Member
Immunize Kansas Coalition**

Chair Landwehr, Vice Chair Eplee, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the Immunize Kansas Coalition (IKC), this written testimony is submitted in **opposition of House Bill 2498**. IKC is a group of Kansas providers, health department officials, researchers and educators working together to improve the health of Kansans through improved vaccination rates to protect against vaccine-preventable disease. IKC is an independent and objective source of evidence and facts. IKC's members volunteer their time and resources to support our mission of protecting every Kansan from vaccine preventable diseases. We do this work because we believe in the science behind the vaccine recommendations, and like you, we want only the best for the residents of Kansas. One of our goals is to provide education and information, which will empower you, as legislators, to process and respond to the information you are receiving in an informed way.

Let me first start by definitively stating that IKC does not currently promote, recommend, nor are working to ensure that COVID vaccination is added to the list of school required wellness vaccines; that is not our role. We provide this testimony in opposition of HB 2498 in order to protect the integrity of the current process by which the immunization schedule is set for childcare and school entry in Kansas.

This bill before you today is being proposed as “necessary” to protect our students from an impending COVID vaccine requirement, but that’s not what this is really about. It is really the first step in undoing Kansas’ current process for adjusting the wellness vaccine requirements for school and childcare attendance. Kansas’ current process is considered the “Gold Standard” for how school entry requirements are managed. The attempt to change this process is something that has been working its way through the legislature, in some version, each of the last two legislative sessions and began BEFORE the start of the COVID pandemic. HB 2601 in 2020 sought to shift authority for setting school entry requirements from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) to the legislature, out of an unfounded fear that the secretary would add the HPV vaccination to the list. SB 212 in 2021 would have listed the current required wellness vaccines in statute, not allowing any changes to the current requirements to be made by the secretary, and the driving force behind that bill was again unfounded fear that the secretary would to require the COVID vaccine once it was approved for children. And that brings us to HB 2498, a different version of the same “ask”, seeking to play off of legitimate fear and uncertainty.

We know that vaccinations are among the greatest achievements of public health. The current childhood vaccination schedule protects against many diseases that once claimed the lives of thousands each year in the U.S. With the potential for the epidemiology of diseases to shift over time, new diseases to emerge, and vaccination recommendations to change, it is important that the list of childcare and school vaccination requirements remain under the authority of KDHE. Minimal changes have been made to the list of school vaccination requirements since the regulation became effective, only three times in the past 41 years. Vaccinations have only been added to the schedule after having been safely provided to children for many years prior to their addition. The COVID vaccine does not meet that expectation; it’s been around for less than 15 months.

Additionally, in a recent statewide survey¹ conducted by Public Opinion Strategies in January and February of this year, Kansas voters were clear about where they thought the authority to set vaccine requirements should reside. 85% of Kansas voters, across party lines, believe that KDHE is the appropriate entity to set wellness vaccine policy for Kansas Children.

KDHE has the clinical expertise to make those decision and they've gotten it right each time. While we don't anticipate the secretary will attempt to add COVID vaccination to the schedule, just like there has been no action or conversation about adding the season flu vaccine, it is important to ensure the integrity of this process and not deviate from the "gold standard"....even for COVID. All fifty states have statutes related to required wellness vaccinations for school entry, and each of those states allow the department of health to make any necessary adjustments to the requirements.

Current communications you are receiving might urge you to "act now" to prevent COVID Vaccines from being required for school entry next year. However, that's just one of the many messages coming at you that simply is not true. Thank you for the opportunity to present our concern. In summary, we **oppose HB 2498** and urge you to maintain the current process for establishing required wellness vaccines for childcare and school entry.

Sarah Irsik-Good, MHA
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Immunize Kansas Coalition Board of Directors

¹ Kansas Immunization Poll Results; <https://nurturekc.org/kansans-support-vaccines/>