

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

CANCER CENTER

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

March 22, 2021

Roy A. Jensen, M.D.

Director

The University of Kansas Cancer Center

Kansas Masonic Cancer Research Institute

William R. Jewell, M.D. Distinguished Masonic Professor

Chairman Hilderbrand, Vice Chairman Gossage, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of The University of Kansas Cancer Center, this written testimony is **submitted in opposition of Senate Bill 212**.

The University of Kansas Cancer Center, as an organization, opposes Senate Bill 212 for the reasons discussed below.

Vaccinations are one of the greatest public health accomplishments. They have significantly decreased incidence rates of multiple vaccine-preventable diseases including hepatitis B, a leading cause of liver cancer in the United States. Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and often only produces mild symptoms; sometimes, the infection does not produce any symptoms. Children with hepatitis B are generally asymptomatic.

One major difficulty with hepatitis B frequently not producing symptoms is that it often leads to the infection being left untreated for decades, wreaking havoc on the liver. This kind of chronic infection can cause significant damage without an individual being aware anything is happening. Many of those diagnosed with hepatitis B find out they have it at a late stage when it has caused other significant health issues like liver cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, liver cancer is among the top six cancer types in terms of estimated deaths in Kansas this year. In the last twenty years, liver cancer incidence and mortality have more than doubled in Kansas.

Currently, school-age students in Kansas are required to receive the hepatitis B vaccine before enrolling in school. Vaccination is the best way to protect against hepatitis B; it is an important step in reducing the risk of liver cancer. If a vaccine can lower cancer risk – and potentially reduce deaths as a result – while simultaneously protecting against a disease, vaccinating eligible individuals is essential.

The current childhood vaccination schedule authorized by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) protects against many diseases that once claimed the lives of thousands every year. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) sets forth best scientific recommendations for immunizations in an effort to protect children from vaccine-preventable diseases. Senate Bill 212's attempt to remove the authority of public health experts at KDHE to continue determining the childhood vaccination schedule hinders that effort and jeopardizes their ability to protect children in Kansas. Those public health experts need the flexibility and authority to respond to recommendations from the ACIP, recommendations that inform decisions to both add and remove vaccines from the schedule.

In response to the furor surrounding vaccinations for Covid-19, the public has articulated a strong preference for vaccine recommendations to be separated from politics. Political messages related to vaccinations, whether from the right or the left, create confusion and distrust. Fortunately, our state health officials have ready access to non-partisan, scientific recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Indeed, a member of our cancer center, Dr. Kevin Ault serves as a member of this advisory group.

Vaccinations have protected the lives and health of countless Kansans. Vaccines are safe, and side effects – when they occur – are typically minor and temporary. Vaccines are closely and continuously monitored by the United States vaccine safety program. On top of being effective, safe, and well-monitored, one vaccine in particular – hepatitis B – may help reduce the risk of liver cancer, a cancer that will claim the lives of many Kansans this year. At The University of Kansas Cancer Center, it is our duty to make a significant impact in decreasing the burden of cancer across our state. Advocating to keep the authority to determine vaccination requirements with the state health department, as nearly every state does, is one way we can realize that impact.

I appreciate the opportunity to present these concerns on behalf of The University of Kansas Cancer Center. In summary, we **oppose Senate Bill 212** and are in favor of KDHE retaining the flexibility and authority to be responsive to new vaccines recommended by the ACIP.

Roy A. Jensen, M.D.

Kansas City, KS

Director

The University of Kansas Cancer Center

Kansas Masonic Cancer Research Institute

William R. Jewell, M.D. Distinguished Masonic Professor

References:

- **American Cancer Society** at <https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/#!/state/Kansas>
- **Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T.** at <https://statecancerprofiles.cancer.gov/quick-profiles/index.php?statename=kansas>