

**Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
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Executive Director**

Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Erickson, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Immunize Kansas Coalition (IKC), this written testimony is submitted in **opposition of Senate Bill 315**.

IKC is a group of Kansas health care 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 trust 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. I am providing this testimony in opposition of SB 315 in order to maintain the current process for vaccine requirement exemptions for childcare and school entry; protect the freedom of private businesses to set vaccine requirements in the best interest of their employees and patrons; and keep students safe from meningitis outbreaks.

Vaccine requirements are determined based on scientific recommendations for immunizations. These requirements keep children and adolescents safe by ensuring they are protected when at schools, where potential exposure to life-altering diseases is high. Expanding exemptions is the first step in unraveling the critical work that has nearly eradicated diseases like polio, hepatitis, measles, mumps, and rubella. In a 2022 poll (<https://nurturekc.org/kansans-support-vaccines/>), 67% of Kansans rejected the idea that we should add more exemptions for wellness vaccines. Although 56% agreed in principle that there should be a religious exemption, they believed the religious exemptions should be *stricter* in the following ways:

- 61% wanted religious leader documentation.
- 65% wanted both parents to approve an exemption.
- 64% wanted there to be an annual exemption review.

Expanding exemptions by going against the majority of Kansans' wishes discounts evidence and turns back the clock by several decades, failing to protect our children from preventable diseases.

This bill also seeks to take away the freedom of private businesses to have vaccine requirements in the workplace and determine what is in the best interest of their employees and patrons. Employers have the right to protect their employees and customers and establish employee qualifications which can include health and safety standards. Consider the implications of preventing employers in sectors such as veterinarian care, agriculture,



laboratories, septic services, hospitality and food service from setting workplace safety standards to keep their employees and customers safe from diseases such as foodborne and waterborne Hepatitis A, body fluid transmissible Hepatitis B, and Tetanus that can be transmitted from soil, dust and manure through puncture wounds and cuts. Also consider the impacts on hospitals, long-term care, and our most vulnerable Kansans, especially for those at high-risk for contracting and having complications from vaccine-preventable diseases (e.g. immunocompromised, infants, elderly). Workplace vaccination requirements as set by employers are crucial to protect their workforce, as well as those they serve.

Finally, meningococcal meningitis is very serious and can be deadly. While the incidence is rare, infants, teens, and young adults have the highest rates of meningococcal disease in the U.S. College students living in group housing are at increased risk for contracting this disease. (See Andy Marso's book *Worth the Pain: How Meningitis Nearly Killed Me—Then Changed My Life for the Better*). In addition to the morbidity and mortality risks (including hearing loss, neurologic disability, and loss of a limb), the medical cost burden for patients with invasive meningococcal disease is significant. Vaccines can help prevent meningococcal disease. Though there are many causes of meningitis beyond those covered by the vaccines, the best prevention at this time is through vaccination.

Thank you for the opportunity to share why we oppose SB 315. I urge you to maintain the current process for vaccine requirement exemptions for childcare and school entry; protect the freedom of private businesses to set vaccine requirements in the best interest of their employees and patrons; and keep students safe from meningitis by safeguarding the meningococcal vaccination requirement to live in student housing.

Do not hesitate to contact me at ggone@immunizekansascoalition.org with any questions.

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