



KANSAS
ASSOCIATION OF
COUNTIES

715 SW 10th Avenue • Topeka, KS 66612
785-272-2585 • www.kansascounties.org

Senate Judiciary Committee
February 24, 2021
SB 273

Kansas Association of Counties
Neutral Testimony

Chairwoman Warren and members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing the Kansas Association of Counties to offer testimony on SB 273, which deals with the Kansas Emergency Management Act (KEMA). As the KAC observed before the special committee on emergency management in the summer and fall of 2020, the Kansas Emergency Management Act outlines the framework for how Kansas responds to all emergencies.

While KAC agrees that KEMA should be updated, there are some concerns that the Association has with regard to this bill, specifically in Sections 14, 15, and 17, which will affect the ability of a county, specifically county health officers, to respond to an emergency in the future.

County health officers are responsible for preventing the spread of infectious disease. With that responsibility come certain powers. KAC is concerned that the provisions of Section 14 of the bill, specifically preventing local health officers from prohibiting any school district or a school attendance center from operating pursuant to K.S.A. 65-201 and 65-202, and amendments thereto.

K.S.A. 65-202 allows local health officers to investigate cases of “smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid fever, scarlet fever, acute anterior poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis), epidemic cerebro-spinal meningitis and such other acute infectious, contagious or communicable diseases.” Taking a tool out of the toolbox of local health officers handicaps their ability to carry out these duties.

Exempting school districts or schools within any such area during any state of public health disaster emergency, as is done in Section 15 is also concerning. Again, public health officials would lack the ability to prevent the spread of communicable diseases within the county. This is very concerning.

Section 17, which also limit the powers of a local health officer, may also make it more difficult to stop the spread of infectious disease in the next instance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information to the committee.

Jay Hall
Legislative Policy Director and General Counsel
Kansas Association of Counties
hall@kansascounties.org
(785)272-2585, Ext. 307