

Written Testimony of Vicki Collie-Akers to the  
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare  
Opponent on SB 6 • February 13, 2023

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to supply written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 6 regarding restrictions on the authority of the secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and local health officers to prevent the spread of infectious or contagious diseases. I am faculty at the University of Kansas Medical Center and serve as the Kansas Health Foundation Professor of Public Health Practice. While these views do not represent the views of my institution and are only my own, they are formed by years of experience and training as a public health researcher and through partnerships with public health practitioners in local health departments across the state of Kansas.

Disease investigation and related efforts to prevent and control the spread of infectious disease is a fundamental part of public health practice. They are critically important, evidence-based strategies used by health officers and local health departments to protect the health and well-being of Kansans. As someone who works with local health departments throughout Kansas, I have observed health officers and health department staff tirelessly endeavor to implement strategies effectively and ethically, including quarantine and isolation, for infectious disease prevention. SB 6 will remove local authority to use these critical strategies. As public health works to address the threats raised by many infectious diseases, limiting the ability of health officials to only recommend actions poses a threat to the safety and well-being of Kansans. Efforts to remove public health statutory authority, such as is happening with SB 6, are reactionary responses to the COVID-19 pandemic response efforts. COVID-19 is not the only infectious disease to which quarantine and isolation are applied. It is extremely shortsighted to remove tools and strategies, such as quarantine and isolation, which are evidence-based, are applied in compliance with disease investigation guidelines and protocols.

The work of local health departments to promote health and protect Kansans from infectious and environmental hazards is a critical service necessary to our communities. Just like other critical services, such as fire departments, public health departments have tools and procedures which are evidence-based and used only in specific situations. Removing the local authority of well-trained public health professionals to effectively use evidence-based infectious disease prevention strategies is tantamount to cutting off water supply to firefighters' hoses in the middle of battling a fire and undermines efforts to protect the health of people living in Kansas.

Sincerely,

Vicki Collie-Akers