



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 315

March 21, 2023

Chair Gossage and Members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee,

The Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) represents more than 450 of the practicing pediatricians in the state. The KAAP has the fundamental goal that all children and adolescents in Kansas have the opportunity to grow safe and strong. It is with this goal in mind that we want to share our testimony in strong opposition of the proposed **SB 315** that could reduce immunization rates in the state by requiring child care facilities, elementary, secondary and postsecondary educational institutions and employers to grant exemptions from vaccine requirements without inquiring into the sincerity of the request and repealing the meningitis vaccine requirement to live in student housing.

*Vaccines are safe. Vaccines are effective. Vaccines protect **all** of us. Vaccines save lives.*

Pediatricians and Kansans Oppose More Vaccine Exemptions

[In a recent poll](#), 67% of Kansans reject the idea that we should add more wellness vaccine exemptions. Although 56% agree in principle that there should be a religious exemption, they believe the religious exemptions should be more rigorous in the following ways:

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

Expanding exemptions is the first step in unraveling the critical work that has nearly eradicated diseases like polio, hepatitis, measles, mumps, and rubella. Expanding exemptions by going against the majority of Kansans' wishes discounts evidence and turns back the clock by several decades, including failing to protect our children from preventable diseases.

Voters across Kansas strongly trust the safety and efficacy of wellness vaccines.

- 95% of Kansas voters believe wellness vaccines are a good thing, including 77% who say they are *a very good* thing.
- More than 9-in-10 Kansas voters believes wellness vaccines are completely/mostly safe, including strong majorities of Republicans (96%), Independents (95%) and Democrats (98%)



- More than 9-in-10 Kansas voters believes wellness vaccines are completely/mostly effective, including strong majorities of Republicans (97%), Independents (95%) and Democrats (100%)

Immunizations are a safe, effective way to protect children and the health of all Kansans from disease, including some cancers, hospitalization, disability, and death. Children are vaccinated early because they are susceptible to diseases at a very young age. Young children also have the highest risk of complications that could lead to hospitalization or death. When children are vaccinated on time, they are protected from preventable illness which protects everyone around them like grandparents, teachers, and neighbors who may be vulnerable to illness.

Pediatricians and Kansans Oppose Repealing the Meningitis Vaccine Requirement

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. In addition to the morbidity and mortality risks, the medical cost burden for patients with invasive meningococcal disease is significant. Vaccines are available that can help prevent meningococcal disease. Though there are many causes of meningitis beyond the ones covered in the vaccines, **the best prevention at this time is through vaccination.**

Kansans are hardworking and caring neighbors and friends. We know that communities can be healthy and thrive, and it takes all of us working together. Children depend on us, and now is the time to be sure we are using trusted information to make good decisions about our future. Immunizations prevent tens of thousands of deaths, millions of cases of disease, and saves billions of dollars per decade.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our strong opposition to SB 315. We welcome any questions you might have and are happy to serve as your resource on all pediatric related issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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Public Policy Committee Chair
Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics