



# SEDGWICK COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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## Written Testimony on House Bill 2094

**Presented to: Health and Human Services Committee**

**January 18, 2012**

Madame Chair and members of the committee, I am Claudia Blackburn, representing the Sedgwick County Health Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to the proposed changes to K.S.A. 72-5209 and K.S.A. 2010 Supp. 65-508.

Stopping vaccine-preventable diseases – and saving lives in the process – must be a community-wide effort to vaccinate infants, children, adolescents, and adults. Without strong regulations requiring vaccination for schools and childcare settings, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that we would see epidemics of diseases that are nearly under control today.

The proposed broad vaccination exemption, increases the chance for more and more children to go unvaccinated, which increases the chance for disease to be spread and outbreaks to occur. Other states have adopted similar exemptions proposed in this bill. California allows parents to opt out from providing proof that their children have received mandatory vaccinations by stating that they are philosophically opposed to their child being vaccinated. According to the CDC, in 2010, 9,143 cases of pertussis (including ten infant deaths) were reported throughout California. This is the most cases reported in 63 years when 9,394 cases were reported in 1947 and the highest incidence in 52 years when a rate of 26.0 cases/100,000 was reported in 1958. Nine of the infant deaths were under two months of age, too young to be vaccinated against the disease.

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) analyzed non-medical exemptions (like the one proposed) and pertussis incidence data for individuals under age 18. The study looked at data from 1991 – 2004. The result of the study showed that states that have an easier exemption process and personal beliefs exemptions were associated with increased incidences of pertussis. Another JAMA study regarding vaccination personal exemptions found that exemptors were 22 to 35 times more likely to get measles.

I am concerned about how this change may have many impacts on the health of our community and other consequences. If a student were to claim exemption for personal or philosophical reasons, and an outbreak occurred at the school, the student would be subject to the same exclusions that apply to children who have medical or religious exemptions. This means that many more students would be missing school for long periods of time. For example in 2011, there was a Chicken Pox outbreak at one of the schools in Sedgwick County. Five students had claimed exemptions from immunizations. State statute KAR 28-1-6 requires that for Chicken Pox: “Each

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susceptible person in a school, child care facility, or family day care home shall be either vaccinated within 24 hours of notification to the secretary or excluded from the school, the child care facility, or the family day care home until 21 days after the onset of the last reported illness in the school, the child care facility, or the family day care home.” SCHD worked with the school to notify parents. Four of the five students opted to be vaccinated. One child was excluded from school for 21 days resulting in an interruption of learning and likely parental hardship.

That’s a mild example for one disease outbreak and one student. Each year, despite significant efforts from the school district to send reminder letters seeking immunizations records for students, more than a thousand kids are excluded from Wichita Public Schools because they have failed to comply with immunization requirements. The students can return as soon as they receive their immunizations and/or bring the records to school. If at the point of exclusion, parents could simply philosophically disagree because it is inconvenient to take their children to get immunized, we could quickly erode the health protection gains we’ve made through vaccination requirements as thousands may choose this option. Then, as outbreaks may occur, many more children may be excluded from school for 21 days at a time like the Chicken Pox example.

We don't vaccinate just to protect our children. We also vaccinate to protect our grandchildren and their grandchildren. Strong vaccination programs have proven that they can be effective in eradicating disease. Our children don't have to get smallpox shots any more because the disease no longer exists. If we keep vaccinating now, parents in the future may be able to trust that diseases like polio and meningitis won't infect, cripple, or kill children. Vaccinations are one of the best ways to put an end to the serious effects of certain diseases.

In Sedgwick County, we have over 85,000 children enrolled in schools, thousands more in daycares, and over 8,000 births each year. Please help protect the health of these children and generations to come by maintaining the current immunizations regulations.