

Dear Chairman Huebert, Vice Chair Dietrich, and House Education Committee,

Joanne Loethen, MD, practicing pediatrician and internal medicine physician in the Kansas City Metro and resident of Kansas. Clinical duties prohibit me from personally attending the February 13th hearing discussing HB2601. I write in opposition of HB 2601 and ask that you accept this written testimony in lieu of my presence.

Just this week, I have been caring for newborn infants in the Neonatal ICU. Most of my patients are preterm or extremely preterm - some born at just 24 weeks gestation. Today I cared for an infant weighing just 2 lbs. He is on a ventilator, his lungs are fragile, and, should he make it through this tenuous course, he will battle chronic illness for the rest of his life. He is a patient who, at the age of 7, will succumb to viral illnesses that you or I may just view as “the common cold” but for him, will be a threat to his life because of his underlying fragility. In another case not so long ago, I cared for boy, this time 17 years of age, who had been affected by meningococcal meningitis - a devastating disease that can alter normal development and future independence. A disease for which we have a vaccine to prevent it. This gentleman could no longer walk independently and will battle a lifetime of debilitating seizures because of his illness. He will likely never live independently due to his disabilities.

Despite these stories I tell you, please don't take my word for why vaccines are beneficial - the evidence is clear, vaccines save lives. Seventeen million lives have been saved from the measles vaccine since 2000, cervical cancer rates are down 29% in women after development of the HPV vaccine, and the influenza vaccine has been shown to prevent 130,000 hospitalizations and save 61,000 lives. Hospitalizations cost our state money and lost productivity, while the unfortunate lives lost are Kansans lost. Prior epidemics of disease such as influenza, polio, and measles have been contained by no other reason than for the vaccines which have aimed to eradicate them. I encourage this committee to not succumb to anecdotal stories heard at this hearing. Rather, examine the evidence by which vaccines have shown time and time again to save lives and prevent devastating disease.

Thank you for your time.

Joanne Loethen MD
Prairie Village, KS