



Testimony in Opposition to HB 2601

Tracy Russell, Executive Director, Nurture KC

Chairman Huebert and members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Tracy Russell and I serve as Executive Director of Nurture KC, an organization dedicated to improving maternal and infant health for families, reducing the health disparities that exist for families of color in particular. Nurture KC also coordinates the Mid America Immunization Coalition, known as MAIC. MAIC serves Johnson and Wyandotte Counties in Kansas. The mission of MAIC is to educate and advocate on the importance of immunization as a key tool in disease prevention.

I am here today to convey MAIC's opposition to HB 2601. As we continue to see outbreaks of preventable disease nationally and locally, it is imperative that the structures and institutions that are best equipped to react and combat disease retain the authority and autonomy to do so. HB 2601 requires legislative approval to permanently add vaccines to the required list, removing the authority of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) to perform this function as is current practice. This is problematic for practical administrative reasons as well as hindering efforts to prevent and eradicate disease.

Moving the vaccination process to the legislative arena takes our health experts out of the equation, replacing them with lay persons to make these life and death decisions. This sends an unmistakable message that dilutes and diminishes the positive health impact of immunization, and fails to recognize the necessity of health professionals as the key to continued progress in preventing disease.

Practically, there is the issue of timing if HB 2601 is approved. KDHE must adhere to statutory deadlines in notifying school districts and providers regarding vaccine schedules. Because of the limited time frame of the legislative session, vaccine approval would need to occur early in a legislative session in order to accommodate notification deadlines, potentially creating an administrative nightmare if early approval is not granted.

Finally, it is critical that we not treat data-driven prevention policy as something that should be decided as a matter of opinion. These are evidence-based solutions that are determined through a rigorous scientific process. Political considerations should not play a role in vaccine approval.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and for your consideration of this important issue.