

Andy Marso
Overland Park resident
Bacterial meningitis survivor

Re: Testimony in opposition to House Bill 2662; Feb. 13, 2022

Members of the K-12 Education Budget Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in opposition to House Bill 2662 as a concerned citizen who knows firsthand the value of vaccination.

I have been an advocate for vaccination since 2004, when I contracted a vaccine-preventable disease — bacterial meningitis — as a senior at KU. I was a healthy 22-year-old until one day when I went to bed thinking I had the flu. The next morning I couldn't get out of bed. I would have died in my room if my friends hadn't carried me to a car and drove me to a doctor. Within hours I was airlifted to KU Hospital in critical condition, with multiple organs failing. I spent a month in a medically-induced coma while doctors battled the infection and saved my life.

When I regained consciousness, I realized that I couldn't move my hands and feet. The meningococcal bacteria had cut off circulation to my extremities and my fingers and toes were slowly dying while still attached to my body (see attachments).

I spent the whole summer in the hospital, enduring excruciating treatments to save my arms and legs. I also had surgeries to amputate all of my toes and all but one of my fingers.

Then I spent more than a year in rehab, doing extensive physical and occupational therapy so I could learn to walk again, shower again, feed myself and go to the bathroom on my own.

My medical bills ran to about \$1.5 million. All to treat a disease that can usually be prevented with a shot that costs \$150.

My opposition to HB 2662 focuses solely on one clause, Section 1(c)(6), which prevents schools from enforcing any requirements regarding student vaccinations. This would greatly increase the risk that schools will have outbreaks of infectious disease, including meningitis.

The meningitis shot and many others (MMR, pertussis, varicella, etc.) not only protect the person who receives them, they also prevent that person from transmitting disease to others.

This is important because some people in our society cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. They rely on the people around them being vaccinated to shield them from disease — a concept called herd immunity.

Ending school vaccine requirements would put all sorts of vulnerable students, teachers, and other school staff at risk. Indeed, if enacted, Section 1(c)(6) of this bill could violate the Americans With Disabilities Act, because as school vaccine rates fall, kids with disabilities that impair their immune systems will face unequal access to safe education.

School vaccine requirements have served us well for decades, saving lives and keeping schools open (if you think COVID-19 has been disruptive to in-person schooling, read about the pre-vaccine history of measles). Kansans understand this. A survey recently published by Nurture KC found that more than 90% of Kansans support the current daycare and school vaccine requirements. In fact, more than 60% favor tightening the state's religious exemption from vaccination, which is no surprise given that the exemption is routinely misused by people whose objections to vaccines have nothing to do with religion. The state's largest anti-vaccine group has a section on its website dedicated to helping people do so.

There is no practical, non-ideological reason to end school vaccine rules. There are only deadly downsides. I urge you to vote no on HB 2662 in its current form.

Andy Marso
Overland Park

Attachments:



