



KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Timothy R. Graham, Timothy.Graham@knea.org
Director of Government Relations & Coalitions
Written Testimony – Opponent
Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 541
March 7, 2022

Chairperson Warren, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 541.

SB 541 is a large bill that addresses many different aspects related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This virus, and the worldwide response to it, has brought forth a whole host of philosophical, ethical, scientific, legal, and moral debates.

Kansas NEA does not wish to weigh in on many of the issues addressed in this legislation.

Kansas NEA's opposition to SB 541 is rooted in one sincerely held belief.

Kansas NEA sincerely believes that students and the professionals who work in our schools, deserve a safe place for teaching and learning to occur. The provisions in this bill put the safety and well-being of students and educators at risk.

Parental rights related to their child's education have become a hallmark issue of debate in the 2022 legislative session. Kansas NEA has always recognized a parent's right and expectation to a high level of transparency in the classroom.

Kansas NEA has been clear and consistent in expressing our belief that every parent and guardian should expect that their students are learning in an environment that promotes and exercises safe practices and activities each and every day.

Section 15 of SB 541 greatly reduces the time-honored and widely supported expectation that our children are required to be vaccinated against some of the most devastating of diseases that have taken the lives of many children. Smallpox, Measles, Polio, etc..., have been all but eradicated by vaccinations.

State law already allows for exemptions in the areas of health and religion. However, the expectation is that the word "sincerely" is just what it says. SB 541 allows any family to declare a "sincerely" held belief in order to receive an exemption and without the need to verify that "sincerity."

Kansas classrooms also include students and staff who may suffer from medical conditions putting them at additional risk. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness begins with "life." This bill requires families to simply trust that one person's sincerely held religious belief to NOT vaccinate their child poses no risk to any other children.

Forcing school districts to choose between safety and costly litigation is not in the best interest of students or safety. It distorts the principles of local control and it makes classrooms less safe.

Our children deserve better.

We thank you for your time.