

HEALTH DEPARTMENTPINE STREET HEALTH SERVICES
215 S. PINE STREET, 2ND FLOOR
NEWTON, KANSAS 67114PHONE: 316-283-1637
FAX: 316-283-1757*Investing today for a healthy tomorrow*

Testimony of Lynnette Redington of Harvey County Health Department to the
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Written-Only Opponent for SB 541 March 7, 2022

Chair Warren and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to supply written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 541 which creates multiple changes to how public health responds to contagious diseases. As the Harvey County Health Department director, I have several concerns with SB 541 and the potential negative impacts it could have to decrease the prevention of infectious diseases. I will point out a few opposing issues here.

Section 4 includes a religious exemption for school face mask requirements. There will be no inquiry allowed for this exemption which impedes public health's ability to control infectious disease spread, especially if we have no pharmaceuticals available for a serious airborne disease, like with COVID19. Allowing masks, a proven prevention measure, to be considered merely a 'choice', with no substance of religious proof, shows the downfall of not reflecting on what we have experienced first-hand the past two years.

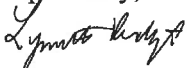
Sections 7 and 8 remove the expertise of health officials, a.k.a. the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, local health officers, and the local boards of health, who consult health officials, in a time of identified contagious and infectious disease in school districts and community colleges. These entities are not required to have or consult health professionals to assess the impact and management of such disease spread. This leads to political will to manage what is clearly a potential community health issue. It would be like going to a garden center when you have something wrong with your car. Not the right experts for the job.

Section 15 makes major changes to K.S.A. 72-6262, namely installing a parent-only approved vaccine exemption for "religious beliefs." Allowing people to opt out of immunizations, without a physician's review and approval, defeats the strategy relied on for ages with vaccinations (herd immunity) and puts the lives of those who cannot receive such immunizations (for medical reasons) at serious risk of illness and death.

SB 541 does not account for the advancements of public health research and fully implementing community health practices. Proven disease restricting measures, like mask, need to be made by health officials and their supporting boards of health. It is not the intent of any public health official to keep individuals from their school, work, or play. Our role is to consider the community's health and reduce any needless spread of a contagious and infectious disease. SB 541 reduces this ability to protect the whole health of a community. Not having the ability to react to our community's immediate health needs with the knowledge, education, and experience gained from years of existence leaves a community more vulnerable for certain economic consequences.

I recommend the opposition to SB 541 and ask that the committee not pass it.

Respectfully,



Lynnette Redington, Director, Harvey County Health Department

ent is committed to protecting the public's health and environment,
preventing disease, and promoting healthy living.