



In-person testimony for the 2021 Special Committee on Government Overreach and Impact of COVID-19 Mandates

Chair, Senator Renee Erickson
Friday, November 12, 2021, 10:00 AM
Kansas Legislative Research Department, kslegres@klrd.ks.gov

Position – Oppose 22RS2356

Chair Erickson and Committee Members,

Mainstream Coalition was founded on the inalienable belief of religious freedom and equal representation in our government through the separation of church and state. This principle has guided our work in Kansas for nearly 30 years, and we believe strongly that there is no place for either the church to govern nor the government to impede on religious freedom. This is why we oppose draft bill RS2356 which makes a mockery of this sacred protection.

This draft bill is an unnecessary solution in search of a problem. Kansas already has robust protections that provide for individuals who seek religious exemptions for vaccinations. The current draft extends this protection and potentially opens the floodgate by eliminating the existing ability of an employer to verify a spurious claim of 'sincerely held religious belief.' In truth, this bill circumvents a private employer's right to protect their staff from a COVID-19 outbreak and endangers their livelihood by creating undue hardships to accommodate unvaccinated individuals in the workplace.

If we lived in a society absent of flagrant misinformation campaigns regarding vaccines broadly and COVID-19 specifically, then this draft bill wouldn't exist. Unfortunately, that isn't our reality. Instead, we're seeing religious exemption requests increase, despite the lack of religious leadership calling for such opposition to the vaccine. The reality is, we live in a hostile political climate propagated by this very committee, and we're seeing that requests for religious exemption can and will easily be conflated with personal and political opposition.

As a Kansas resident, an employer, an elected official, a son, a husband, and a person of faith, I feel obligated to speak out against this proposed bill that will undermine the integrity of the separation of church and state. Further, I strongly oppose any attempt to expand the bill to include such lax provisions for parents wanting to exempt their children from vaccination. We are lucky that the current variants continue to largely spare our children, but we can't be certain that will always be the case, and we can not hogtie our public schools any further with state legislation that preempts their ability to protect student safety, mental health, and ability to learn.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Founded in 1993, the Mainstream Coalition is a nonpartisan nonprofit that advocates for common sense public policy in Kansas. Our members do more than vote.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Poppa', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Poppa, Executive Director
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Founded in 1993, Mainstream Coalition is dedicated to creating a more representative and responsive government by empowering informed participation and meaningful action in the political process.

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