



KANSAS ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

CARING FOR KANSANS

Testimony: SB 391
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
February 15, 2024
By: Jennifer Bacani McKenney, MD, FAAFP
(Opponent—Written only)

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony opposing SB 391, on behalf of the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians (KAFP). In addition to having served as President of the KAFP, I am a practicing family physician and local health officer in rural southeast Kansas. The KAFP represents nearly 2,000 family physicians, resident physicians and medical students across our state. Providing quality health care and resulting in good health outcomes for our patients guide our public policy work.

The Academy believes the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and our local health departments are the most qualified state entities to make determinations about public health safety concerns. Unintentionally, this bill undermines KDHE's mission, which is *to protect and improve the health and environment of all Kansans*.

Public health officers are not political, elected officials; they are professionals--physicians and nurses with the education and experience to make decisions based on science and not anecdote or public opinion. KAFP believes SB 391 presents potential public health implications if adopted into law. Prohibiting the Secretary of Health and Environment and local public health experts from issuing scientifically supported orders to safely manage the spread of disease removes a critical intervention during outbreaks.

Restricting our local health officers' abilities to protect our communities during a time of public health crisis places the health, wellness and livelihood of our patients, families, and communities at risk. Local health officers help decrease the spread of disease through many methods, including educating the public, provided testing, performing contact tracing, temporarily quarantining and isolating those at risk of spreading deadly diseases to others, and administering vaccinations.

The passage of this bill would not only apply to a pandemic similar to COVID-19 but also infectious diseases like Measles, Ebola, and Tuberculosis. These diseases are deadly and highly communicable and require preventative action within hours, not days or weeks to prevent the spread. The importance of quarantine and isolation is that these deadly diseases can be spread so easily to any of us if not contained properly in settings like the grocery store, church, school, or work.

Our local health departments are run by hard-working community members who know their communities well and are trusted by those they serve. Many local health officers throughout the state are family physicians who do public health work in addition to caring for patients in clinics and hospitals every single day. Our members who are appointed to be local health officers are already overseen by their county boards of health and communicate with them and the local health departments constantly. They work closely with elected officials and the health department team to protect the communities in which they live. Their contributions are invaluable to the health of our communities across Kansas.

The KAFP opposes this bill because it would restrict the authority of the secretary of health and environment and local health officers to prevent the introduction and spread of infectious or contagious diseases and repeals the authority of the secretary to quarantine individuals.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit comments on behalf of the KAFP. We appreciate your thoughtful examination of all matters regarding the health and safety of Kansans.

About Kansas Academy of Family Physicians:

KAFP represents nearly 2,000 active, resident, student and life members across the state. Our member physicians are vibrant and trusted members of their communities and are dedicated to creating a healthier Kansas. Quality health care and health outcomes for our patients guide our public policy work. As family physicians, we see people of all ages, both men and women, and we work with almost every type of ailment and illness that afflict our patients.