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February 15, 2024

Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
Kansas State Capital
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

RE: Opposition to SB 391

Chair and Members of the Committee:

As a retired physician now in my eighth decade, I must vigorously oppose SB 391. Vaccinations in this country are now near a “Tipping Point” (JAMA. Jan 23, 2024;331 (4):283-284). Outbreaks of measles has occurred in Ohio, a disease almost eliminated by a vaccine which now some of our citizens decide to refuse. Of the 84 cases, 36 (42%) had to be hospitalized for complications. Measles is not a benign disease and can have serious complications (MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2023;73(31):847-849). The death rate from COVID-19 during the pandemic was ~675/million in unvaccinated 65–79-year-old patient compared to less than 100 in vaccinated patients in the same age group. Death rate in those 80+ years was about 120/million unvaccinated versus about 10 in the vaccinated, a greater than 12-fold difference (CDC, <https://bit.ly/41GVql.o>). Influenza vaccines prevent many deaths, especially in the elderly. DPT vaccines prevent many illnesses in the young. Polio is becoming common in some undeveloped countries because of vaccine hesitancy or vaccine unavailability.

Now I am a registered Republican and consider myself a right-of-center moderate; I am also a physician who is a supporter of Public Health for the public good. We call the USA a republic and a democracy. We certainly have individual rights, but we also have individual responsibilities to the common good, to our fellow citizens. As a society we have developed government and regulations for the common good. We have laws to protect the community such as seat belt laws, drunken driving laws, red light laws, laws against fraud, arson, assault, and murder. We have regulations for vaccinations for a reason—to protect the public., to protect the “Common”. If we only believe in our individual rights but not in the rights of our fellow man, we will no longer have a republic, we will have anarchy. As a country, we cannot survive if we take

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a pure libertarian or progressive left position. We must care about our neighbor's health for the benefit of all.

Finally, the health care costs of vaccine hesitancy or refusal are high, especially when hospitalizations for complications are considered. Just remember all the hospitals overwhelmed with COVID patients, the deaths of numerous doctors and nurses taking care of these patients, the lack of hospital beds for those with non-life-threatening illnesses.

SB 391 is injurious to the citizens of Kansas, the financial stability of the State, our state's reputation, and our ability to attract businesses and people to settle here. I urge you to please oppose the passage of SB 391.

Sincerely,

Karl E Becker

Professor Emeritus,
University of Kansas School of Medicine