

March 7th, 2025

House Committee on Health and Human Services
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to Senate Bill 29 – which revokes the authority of the Secretary of Kansas Department of Health and Environment to impose quarantines and other protective measures.

Chair Carpenter and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this written-only testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 29. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by economically just systems. We oppose this legislation as it would jeopardize community health and the health of first responders as well as being resource inefficient.

SB 29 would harm communities and their first responders. It would eliminate the authority of public health officials to issue quarantines, which could prevent the spread of infectious disease. Quarantine is the most effective tool available to public health officials to achieve that goal. Moreover, this legislation would expose not just the broader public but first responders – police, paramedics, and firefighters, and hospital and clinic staff – to potentially deadly outbreaks of infectious diseases. This would lead to an even greater loss of on-duty lives than in COVID where, according to the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, that disease was the leading reason for police deaths in 2020.

Furthermore, SB 29 would exacerbate disparities in health outcomes, especially during an infectious disease outbreak. For example, COVID deaths were disproportionately high amongst Hispanic/Latino, Black, and Native Americans, relative to their white counterparts, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Similarly, COVID death rates were higher in rural versus urban counties, according to a 2022 study in the *Journal of Public Health Management Practice*. Without the ability to stanch an infectious disease outbreak, these disparities would likely become more pronounced.

Last, SB 29 would drastically increase the economic and other associated costs of an infectious disease outbreak as public health officials will not have the authority to contain the spread. A recent study published in the *National Institutes of Health National Library of Medicine* shows that prevention measures cost an estimated 1/20th of the overall cost of life lost and other expenses from emerging infectious diseases.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote no on SB 29. Not only does it hamper public health professionals' ability to take reasonable, appropriate actions to limit the spread of dangerous disease, but it would also lead to real harm to people, especially Kansans of color and people living in

rural areas. This sort of legislation would have negative effects on the Kansas economy and our ability to keep our communities safe and healthy during an infectious disease outbreak.

Please feel free to reach out to me at nmadden@healthforward.org if you have any questions or requests for additional information.

Respectfully,

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Health Forward Foundation

