



February 5, 2025

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Kansas Action for Children
Verbal Testimony in Opposition to SB 19
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chairperson Gossage and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 19, which would weaken long-standing vaccination policies, eliminate quarantine protocols, and prevent local and state officials from quickly stopping the spread of infectious disease outbreaks.

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

This bill would force employers, health care entities, schools, and all “persons” (as defined by the bill) to allow anyone onto their premises (among other listed activities) even if someone chooses to opt out of vaccinations based on the proposed “conscientious objection” right. This “right” is unnecessary, particularly in schools and child care spaces, as Kansas already has policies in place for requesting exemptions from vaccine requirements. Kansas law – since 1961¹ for schools² and since 1992³ for child care centers⁴ – has had religious and medical exemptions parents may use to opt out their children from vaccinations. **We question why this bill is needed with those policies already in place.**

Additionally, employers have the right to establish employee qualifications, which can include health and safety standards, to protect their employees and customers. Under SB 19, it may no longer be possible for them to do this, even as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission allows companies to require flu and other vaccines.

Vaccination requirements in hospitals and other health care facilities protect both staff and patients from contracting and transmitting vaccine-preventable diseases. Their employees care for many vulnerable Kansans who are unable to be vaccinated due to age or certain medical conditions and those who are immunocompromised due to disease, treatments for disease (e.g., cancer), or transplants

¹ Kansas Session Laws, L. 1961, Ch. 354, § 2.

² KSA 72-6262.

³ Kansas Session Laws, L. 1992, Ch. 55, § 2.

⁴ KSA 65-508.

(organ and stem cell). Vaccination requirements – where implemented in health care settings – allow vulnerable Kansans to visit hospitals, doctors, nurses, and therapists with the assurance that all precautions have been taken to prevent vaccine-preventable diseases from spreading in that facility.

Under this bill, the choices of a few community members opting out of vaccines seems to supersede the health of many and more than 100 years of proven public health policy. That is dangerous rhetoric, and SB 19 should be rejected for that reason alone.

However, there's one final reason – the concern over measles outbreaks occurring in our state, as it spread in other states throughout 2024.⁵ That is because allowing disease to freely spread quickly becomes costly – and harms our children.

During a 2018 and 2019 measles outbreak in Washington state that resulted in 72 known infections, the public health response to the outbreak cost approximately \$2.3 million.⁶ The investigators estimated that if no isolation or quarantine measures had been required (which could happen under SB 19), the outbreak would have resulted in an additional 1,296 cases and 72,198 contacts, thus increasing the cost of the public health response to more than \$120 million.

A 2023 recent outbreak of measles in Ohio found that out of 85 cases (almost all of which were young, unvaccinated children – some of whom were too young to be vaccinated), 44 experienced complications like ear infections, diarrhea, and pneumonia. Of those 44 cases, 36 were hospitalized, mainly due to dehydration.⁷ Other complications from measles were not reported from this outbreak, but the disease is known to cause blindness, irreparable brain damage, immune amnesia,⁸ and even death.⁹

Finally, when last year's version of this bill had a hearing, there were 20 reported cases of measles in 11 states as of February 15, 2024. As of December 31, 2024, the United States saw 284 reported cases of measles in 2024 in 30 states and the District of Columbia.¹⁰

20 Cases of Measles

11 States (February 15, 2024)



284 Cases of Measles

30 States + D.C. (December 31, 2024)

⁵ Kekatos, M., & Benadjaoud, Y. (January 18, 2024). *Measles outbreaks are occurring in some pockets of the US. Here's why doctors are concerned.* ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/measles-outbreaks-occurring-pockets-us-doctors-concerned/story?id=106440080>

⁶ Pike, J., Melnick, A., Gastañaduy, P. A., Kay, M., Harbison, J., Leidner, A.J., Rice, S., Asato, K., Schwartz, L., and DeBolt, C. (2021). "Societal Costs of a Measles Outbreak." *Pediatrics*. 147(4). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-027037>

⁷ Tiller, E. C., et al. (August 4, 2023). "Notes from the Field: Measles Outbreak — Central Ohio, 2022–2023." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 72:31: 847-849. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7231a3.htm>

⁸ Frederick, E. (2019). "How measles causes the body to 'forget' past infections by other microbes." *Science* <https://www.science.org/content/article/how-measles-causes-body-forget-past-infections-other-microbes>

⁹ CDC. (2020). *Complications of Measles*. <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/symptoms/complications.html>

¹⁰ CDC. (2025). *Measles Cases and Outbreaks*. https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html

Of these cases:

- 89% cases were unvaccinated for measles or unknown vaccination status
- 120 cases under the age of 5 (42%)
- 62 of the 120 cases under the age of 5 were hospitalized (more than 50%).¹¹

If SB 19 becomes law, and people easily opt-out of a measles vaccine, the impact based on the numbers from the research above are obvious. This situation would cost the country and state countless dollars, take parents away from work, harm children, and overrun our health care system.

Vaccines and quarantines are the best tools to stop the spread of measles and other infectious diseases like polio and whooping cough. SB 19 would prevent state and local officials from fully utilizing these tools.

While most of the population is already vaccinated against these diseases, some children are too young to receive standard immunizations. Outbreaks must be quickly stopped through infectious disease outbreak response tools before children become hospitalized, end up with life-long health complications, or die from these diseases.

SB 19's new method for opting out of vaccination requirements – especially for children – is the first step in unraveling the critical work that has nearly eradicated diseases like polio, measles, and whooping cough. This bill would turn back the clock by several decades, failing to protect children from vaccine-preventable diseases.

For all these reasons, we respectfully request the Committee to oppose SB 19 and instead work to maintain the health and safety of our state's children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony in opposition to SB 19. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at heather@kac.org.

¹¹ Ibid.