



## ORAL TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF SB 19

February 5, 2025

Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Clifford, Ranking Member Holscher and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Dr. Rebecca Reddy, a board-certified pediatrician in Wichita and a member of the Kansas Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) Board of Directors. I am here to express KAAP's strong opposition to SB 19. This bill would create a broad right to refuse vaccines and other medical care based on personal beliefs and would remove critical public health measures related to quarantines. While personal choice is important, this bill removes long-standing safeguards that help keep Kansas children, families, and communities healthy.

KAAP represents more than 400 pediatricians and trainees in Kansas. Our job is to keep kids healthy so they can learn, grow, and thrive. Vaccines have been one of the greatest successes in public health, protecting children from diseases that can cause severe illness, disability, and death. When kids stay healthy, they stay in school, parents stay at work, and our economy remains strong.

SB 19 weakens protections that have kept Kansas families safe from contagious diseases for generations. It could make it harder to enforce school and child care immunization requirements, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. It would also limit local health officials' ability to act quickly in public health emergencies, such as requiring quarantine when medically necessary to prevent the spread of dangerous diseases like tuberculosis or measles.

Vaccines work by preparing our immune systems to fight disease—just like children learn to read by starting with the ABCs. Once a child learns to read, they never forget how. In the same way, a vaccinated immune system remembers how to fight a virus long after the vaccine itself is gone. This simple but powerful protection is why immunizations are widely regarded as one of the most effective tools in modern medicine.



Kansas already allows vaccine exemptions for both medical and religious reasons. These exemptions provide families with options while maintaining strong protections for public health. What's really at stake here is making sure our schools and childcare centers are safe, healthy places for kids to learn and grow. Contagious diseases spread quickly in a closed network like a school. Childhood vaccines have done such a good job of reducing the incidence of once common illnesses that many people have never seen those illnesses.

Kansas voters strongly support immunization requirements. A 2022 statewide poll found that 67% of Kansans oppose adding more vaccine exemptions, and over 95% believe vaccines for diseases like measles, mumps, and polio are essential for public health. This support is consistent across political lines, showing that immunization is not a partisan issue—it's a matter of protecting our children and ensuring safe schools and childcare centers.

SB 19 also undermines public health efforts to stop the spread of contagious diseases. Right now, Kansas is experiencing a tuberculosis outbreak in Wyandotte and Johnson counties, with 67 active cases and 79 additional dormant cases. TB spreads through the air and requires careful public health management. Kansas health officials are currently tracking nearly 400 individuals connected to the outbreak, making sure they receive testing and treatment. This situation is a reminder that strong public health policies protect all of us. SB 19 would make it harder to contain outbreaks like this in the future.

Balancing personal freedom with public responsibility is key. While individual choice is important, we must also protect the most vulnerable—newborns, children with medical conditions, and those who rely on community immunity. Vaccines prevent disease, save lives, and reduce the burden on our health care system and economy.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject SB 19. Protecting the health of Kansas children keeps our schools open, our workforce strong, and our communities thriving. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rebecca Reddy, MD, FAAP



**KANSAS CHAPTER**  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
Incorporated in Kansas

➤ 785.380.6100

➤ [KansasAAP.org](https://www.KansasAAP.org)

➤ PO Box 860481, Shawnee, KS 66286

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