

12 January 2012

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Robert Wittler and I am a board certified pediatric infectious disease physician in Wichita, KS. I have been a full time faculty member of the KU School of Medicine – Wichita since 1995 when my family and I moved to Wichita after being a physician in the US Army. I adamantly oppose the bill allowing for a philosophical exemption for school entry required immunizations.

I graduated from medical school in 1982 so I saw the devastating effects of *Haemophilus influenza* type B infections on children. I then had the pleasure of seeing that disease essentially eliminated from the United States due to immunization. I have also witnessed the consequences of missed or delayed immunizations with significant outbreaks of measles in the late 1980s and more recently a resurgence of pertussis (whooping cough) resulting in childhood deaths.

Immunizations and clean drinking water are the two greatest public health accomplishments in the past century. Immunizations not only benefit the individual receiving the vaccine but also the population due to the concept of herd immunity. Infectious diseases require a population of susceptible individuals in order to continue to circulate in a population. By making it easy to opt out of receiving immunizations we are placing the greater population at risk, specifically children who are the most susceptible to illness and who may have a true medical exemption to receiving certain vaccines (e.g., a child with leukemia who is receiving chemotherapy).

A study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine in 2007 (Thompson JW et al, *Am J Prev Med* 2007;32:194-201) looked at the impact of a philosophical exemption on childhood immunization rates in Arkansas. The total number of exemptions increased by 23% in year 1 to 2, by an additional 17% from year 2 to 3, and by another 50% from year 3 to 4. It was also noted that nonmedical exemptions clustered geographically, suggesting concentrated risks for vaccine-preventable diseases in those specific communities. Over time the increase in susceptible individuals in a population will allow for reintroduction of an infection that was previously uncommon or rare.

As a father of five children I also understand that parents want to do everything possible to protect their children and keep them safe. My children were fully immunized as I knew that was one of the safest ways that goal could be accomplished. I urge you to reject a philosophical exemption for vaccinations.

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