



To: House Committee on Health and Human Services

From: Rachelle Colombo
Director of Government Affairs

Date: January 17, 2012

Subject: HB 2094 – Vaccinations; exemption from getting based on reasons of conscience or personal belief

The Kansas Medical Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill 2094, which would amend state immunization requirements for child care facilities and public school students to allow a parent or guardian to refuse immunizations based on "reasons of personal conscience or personal beliefs."

Medical and religious exemptions are now the only available current immunization exemptions in Kansas. State law recognizes exemptions to immunization for medical contraindications as determined by a licensed healthcare provider. All states except for Mississippi and West Virginia allow parents to opt out because of their religious beliefs. And every state allows for children who have a medical reason to opt out

The Kansas Medical Society would be very concerned about the increase in the number of parents choosing to opt out of mandatory vaccinations if HB 2094 were to become law. Public health officials nationwide continually advocate keeping immunization rates high enough to confer "community immunity" to the general public. Community immunity occurs when the vaccination of a portion of the population provides protection to unvaccinated people. Depending on the disease and the community in which it might occur, in order for unvaccinated people to be protected against communicable diseases, approximately 75 to 95 percent of the population has to be vaccinated against them, medical experts say. Even a relatively small amount of the childhood population eschewing immunizations is enough to put a school or child-care facility at risk of an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease if the disease was introduced.

For example, California is now one of 20 states that allow parents to opt out from providing proof that their children have received mandatory vaccinations by stating that they are philosophically opposed to their child being vaccinated. Public health officials state that California's vaccine exemption system is among the easiest in the country and partially the cause for a whooping cough outbreak in 2010 which resulted in more than 5,000 people getting sick and resulted in the deaths of nine babies. Eight of the infants were under two months of age, too young to be vaccinated against the disease. A recent

study from the Emory Vaccine Center at Emory University in Atlanta showed that that in states where getting an exemption is easy, such as in California, the rate of whoopingcough was at least 50 percent higher than in states that made it more difficult for parents to opt out.

Public health officials nationwide have been concerned about the increase in the number of parents choosing to opt out of mandatory vaccinations since the late 1990s. In 1998, English doctor Andrew Wakefield published a study of 12 children linking the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine to autism. The paper caused rates of vaccination to fall and cases of measles to climb in the country. The study and has since been discredited and the medical journal which published the research retracted the study claiming that its authors had made false claims about how the study was conducted. Another recent hot-button issue relative to vaccines has been thimerosal, a mercury derivative once used as a preservative in some pediatric vaccines. It was eliminated in the United States from all but some flu vaccines in 2001. Numerous studies have found no connection between thimerosal and autism, the most recent of which was a Centers for Disease Control paper published in September

Vaccines are one of the most successful medical advances of all time. Vaccines save lives and protect against the spread of disease. The American Academy of Pediatrics states that most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease. And if a vaccinated child does get the disease, the symptoms are usually less serious than in a child who hasn't been vaccinated. There may be mild side effects, like swelling where the shot was given, but they do not last long. And it is rare for side effects to be serious.

The Kansas Medical Society thanks you for your time and the opportunity to present our position in opposition to HB 2094.