

Will Darrah, President Elect
Positive Directions, Inc.
Statement in Opposition to SB 341 as presented
House Committee on Health and Human Services
March 10, 2016

Good afternoon Mr Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am grateful for your time, thank you for your work, and promise to be succinct to honor it. First I should introduce myself – I am Will Darrah from Wichita. Professionally, I am an independent oil and gas producer in this state and others, a director to Beaver Grain Corporation in Barton County, a director to the Charles Machine Works manufacturer of Ditch Witch construction equipment, a director to Fisch Bowl Inc., and finally, a director and past president of Positive Directions Inc. The first four I share with you as references to my qualifications in matters of business, but it is my work with Positive Directions Inc. that requires our attention today. At Positive Directions, we strive to help people living with HIV and, most importantly, make it our mission to stop the spread of HIV. The bill in question, SB 341, as presented will constrict our ability to stop the spread of the disease in Kansas and, in the case of HIV cost the state more than it expects to save with its implementation. Furthermore, it will damage the lives of those who are unfortunate enough to be diagnosed with the disease in the future.

I appreciate that the state should not be subsidizing an expensive drug when a less expensive one will get similar results. In fact I personal buy generic drugs whenever possible understanding that often they are exactly the same except for price. However in the case of HIV there is currently too much difference between drugs for a step system to be an effective treatment option and instead becomes a danger to the health of the citizens of Kansas by increased infection rates. To get us all on the same page, we should understand the progression of HIV treatments:

Mid 80's: A diagnosis of HIV was nothing more than a death sentence.

Mid 90's: The FDA approved the first "highly active antiretroviral treatment." (HAART or ART for short. Let's call them ART here with the understanding that ART are the drugs used to suppress the virus and prevent the spread of HIV.) In these days, patients took cupsful of mixed types of ART drugs (or "cocktails") that worked in combination to suppress HIV in the individual's body. These pills extended lives and suppressed the virus, but were toxic and akin to a life on chemotherapy. As such, people often stopped taking them for a brief period, known as a drug holiday. During the drug holiday, the virus mutated and strengthened to form a resistant strain.

Mid 00's: Pharmaceutical companies began to provide single pills that replaced many of the previous ART drugs to help eliminate the cocktails. However, it is important to note that the drugs of this era are no longer effective in many cases, mostly because of afore mentioned mutations. HIV infections often vary from person to person. Much like the flu vaccine, drugs that worked last year may not be effective against the virus you're facing today.

Today: We have effective single-pill medications with low toxicity. This is significant because when the afflicted population takes these pills, they stop the spread of HIV. Having a single, low-toxicity pill instead of a cupful of toxic pills means patients can and do take the medication regularly. When this happens, the virus stays in remission. A virus in remission does not evolve and is not passed to others.

We are at place where we can see a path to the end of HIV in Kansas. However it is only due to new and effective treatment methods available. Senate Bill 341 as it is in danger of costing the state money in the case of HIV. It will prevent doctors from being able to immediately prescribe the right drugs to repress HIV. If HIV is not repressed, we will see increased rates of infection and hospitalization in Kansas, both of which will cost the state money, to say nothing of the human cost.

In as much I request that the SB 341 be amended so that it either excludes the human immunodeficiency virus with regards to step therapy or follow the example of other states and private sector entities that have implemented similar plans and allows for clinical practices guidelines to govern in cases such as these where bureaucracy might do more harm than good.

Kindly,

Will Darrah