

Testimony of Dan Partridge with the Lawrence Douglas County Public Health Department to the

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Opponent on SB 6 • February 13, 2023

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee:

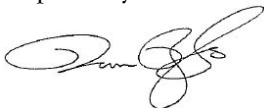
Thank you for the opportunity to supply written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 6 regarding restrictions on the authority of the secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and local health officers to prevent the spread of infectious or contagious diseases. As a local health department, it is our responsibility to investigate, diagnose and address health problems and hazards affecting the population residing within our jurisdiction.

Major areas of concern are:

- 1) Changes to K.S.A. 65-118 removing teachers and school administrators from those required to report if a person is suffering from, or has died from, an infectious or contagious disease. Schools, by design, congregate children, and adults. These gatherings provide opportunity for diseases to spread and early surveillance and reports that helps identify outbreaks early is key to limiting the spread of disease and the associated morbidity and mortality. School reporting is critical to protecting the health of children and should remain.
- 2) Changes to K.S.A. 65-119. This removes the ability of the county/joint board of health, or the local health officer, to prohibit public gatherings when necessary to control infectious and contagious diseases. When outbreaks occur, sometimes temporarily shutting down certain public gatherings is a critical means to prevent a disease from continuing to spread. This is particularly so for diseases that lack a pharmaceutical intervention and are difficult to prevent the spread of via straightforward means (e.g., hand washing). Removing the ability to prohibit such gatherings will endanger lives and thus we feel this statute should not be modified.
- 3) This bill focuses on removing the authority from local health officers to issue orders. As a reminder, the Kansas Legislature (during the 2020 Special Session via HB 2016) already took steps to ensure elected officials have clear oversight on the orders of local health officers. SB 6 takes this a step further and unnecessarily and, at the risk of the public's health, removes local health officer ability to limit the spread of disease.

Protecting the health and safety of Kansans is public health's responsibility and our top priority. The ability to prevent the spread of infectious and contagious diseases is a critical approach to achieving that priority. SB 6 undermines this by reducing the required reporters when it comes to the school setting and stripping the ability to prohibit public gatherings when necessary. Both changes would put the health and safety of Kansans at risk. As such, the Lawrence Douglas County Public Health Department opposes SB 6.

Respectfully,



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