

Testimony of Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health  
To House Committee on Health and Human Services  
Written Opponent Testimony for Senate Sub for SB 29 | March 7, 2025

Chairman Carpenter and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health (LDCPH) to provide written, opponent testimony for Senate Sub for SB 29, which would amend K.S.A. 65-119, removing the authorization for a county or joint board of health or a local health officer to prohibit public gatherings when necessary for the control of infectious or contagious diseases. LDCPH serves residents in Lawrence and Douglas County and works to create abundant and equitable opportunities for good health.

While SB 29 was amended in the Senate Public Health and Welfare committee, we are still concerned about the new provisions of the proposed legislation. Limiting exposure of infectious diseases at public gatherings is incredibly important to curtail the overall spread of harmful and contagious diseases. Public health must have the ability to issue orders to control diseases, especially in large groups where disease can spread and quickly spiral out of control.

As an example, Texas is currently experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of measles in the past 10 years<sup>i</sup>, with 1 child already succumbing to the illness.<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately, measles is so contagious, up to 9 people out of 10 who were exposed will become sick. <sup>iii</sup> This outbreak has quickly spiraled out of control while Texas has actively been rolling back public health protections since the COVID-19 pandemic. <sup>iv</sup> Making similar restrictions in Kansas could have the same damaging effects.

Public health officials in Douglas County and throughout Kansas are very knowledgeable in the field of public health and only require quarantine when it is medically and physically necessary to curtail the spread of potentially dangerous diseases. From 2015-2023, Douglas County had a Mumps outbreak that infected 18 people. The average age of those infected was 26 years old. Due to this, infected people were encouraged to stay home if they were symptomatic, but none of the 18 people had confirmed quarantine dates. This data provides evidence that local health departments and local health officers are capable and have an established process for curtailing diseases. Removing our ability to do our jobs effectively not only puts Kansans at risk, but it disregards our ability to provide services for our community. As members of our community, we are the most knowledgeable about our community's needs and removing them could have serious, if not deadly effects.

As Dr. Samuel Crumbine once said, "the health of all of us is dependent on the health of all of us", we hope that you consider the serious consequences of this legislation, and do not vote SB 29 favorably for passage.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Smith, MPH  
Executive Director  
Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health

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<sup>i</sup> *Measles exposures in Central & South-Central Texas* | Texas DSHS. (n.d.). <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/news-alerts/measles-exposures-central-south-central-texas>

<sup>ii</sup> Shastri, D. (2025, February 26). *A Texas child who was not vaccinated has died of measles, a first for the US in a decade* | AP News. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/measles-outbreak-west-texas-death-rfk-41adc66641e4a56ce2b2677480031ab9>



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- <sup>iii</sup> *Measles is Highly Contagious Infographic.* (2024, May 9). Measles (Rubeola). [https://www.cdc.gov/measles/resources/contagious-infographic.html?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/measles/contagious-infographic.html](https://www.cdc.gov/measles/resources/contagious-infographic.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/measles/contagious-infographic.html)
- <sup>iv</sup> Weber, L. (2022, July 18). Conservative blocs unleash wave of litigation to curb public health powers. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/07/18/1111766924/conservative-bloc-litigation>



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