



AFFILIATED WITH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

SB 160 – Prohibition of public health department accreditation

**Presented to
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare**

**By
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Chairwoman Pilcher-Cook and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to share comments on behalf of the Kansas Public Health Association. Our organization is compelled to provide testimony on this bill prohibiting public health accreditation because of its potential to greatly hinder the work that is underway to improve quality of public health services provided through Kansas' health departments.

To clarify, the purpose of voluntary health department accreditation is to improve quality and accountability in the public health system. The Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) was established in 2007 as a non-profit entity to implement and oversee a national public health department accreditation program that achieves the following:

- Promotes high performance and continuous quality improvement
- Recognizes high performers that meet nationally accepted standards of quality and improvement
- Illustrates health department accountability to the public and policymakers
- Increases the visibility and public awareness of governmental public health, leading to greater public trust and increased health department credibility
- Clarifies the public's expectations of health departments.

Some concern has been expressed that PHAB accreditation would potentially conflict with or supersede local and state public health statutes and authority. The opposite is true: PHAB standards support the existing laws and public health authority of the jurisdiction served by the health department. One of the PHAB standards states, "A governmental public health department operates with specific authorities to protect and preserve the health of the population within its jurisdiction. These authorities may be set forth in state statute, rules and regulation, local ordinances, administrative code, charters, or resolutions. Authorities may be regulatory or programmatic. This standard assures that the health department understands its authority and



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that of its governance entity for the department's roles and responsibilities and that such authority is put into practice. "

Some have also questioned the relationship of public health accreditation to the Affordable Care Act. According to Kaye Bender, President and CEO of PHAB, no such relationship exists. The work of PHAB in establishing public health standards and the accreditation process preceded the work to develop the Affordable Care Act.

National standards and accreditation of public services provided by government are not new concepts. For many years, police and fire departments, as well as emergency medical services (EMS) departments have been involved in national accreditation. After years of deliberations and planning, health department accreditation has come about as the result of an open, thoughtful process that incorporated input from a wide range of public health professionals and critical stakeholders. The National Association of Counties has passed a resolution in support of accreditation for local government.

Here in Kansas and nationwide, our local, state, and tribal health departments are working together and collaborating with community partners to improve the quality of services they provide. National public health department accreditation is the driver of this system-wide focus on quality improvement. Communities served by an accredited health department will benefit through more consistent, effective public health services that prevent disease and promote and protect health. Policymakers and the public should support our health departments in this effort. SB 160 appears to be inconsistent with support of health departments in their efforts to improve quality and better meet the needs of the communities they serve.