

Testimony for Public Hearing
Committee on Public Health and Welfare
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Senate Bill No. 160 (Committee): An Act Concerning Local Health Departments;
Prohibition of Accreditation Requirements

Good Afternoon Committee Members. My name is Mary Ransom. I am the Director of the Franklin County Health Department. I stand in opposition to this bill.

Fifteen years ago Kansas Association of Local Health Department members recognized the importance of quality standards for public health. With assistance from the Kansas Health Foundation and KHI we began developing and testing standards for Kansas local health departments. What I, as a member of the research team, learned from the process was twofold: first, the intellectual difficulty and expense of developing standards from scratch is enormous, and, two, how very different the capability and quality of public health service was among counties in Kansas. To have standards developed by public health expertise garnered from public health workers across the country is a tremendous attribute of the voluntary accreditation process now offered to us. We needed quality standards twenty years ago and we need them now.

The quality standards as researched and developed hand in hand with local public health across the nation gives us the guidance to provide our local communities excellence in public health service. In Standard 2, for example, we are simply asked to demonstrate our ability to fulfill our Kansas Statutory responsibility to investigate and mitigate infectious disease. The expectation is that protocols and procedures are current and that we have plans and a means to gain additional help should an outbreak occur. While some might assume that local public health stays current on written protocols and contact numbers for community response partners, it wasn't necessarily reality. We now have a process to examine ourselves consistently to assure that we haven't let something this important slide by.

Over the last few years my department and regional partners, our county commissioners and local community partners have invested tremendous hours and effort to improve our provision of the ten essential services in order to demonstrate that we deserve to be recognized nationally as an accredited, professional, quality public health department. Already, the improvement in collaboration and understanding of the assets and needs of our local communities is making a difference, driven by our desire to attain accreditation. Like so many other professional organizations, public health is motivated to consistently improve and wishes to be recognized for that effort.

I respectfully request that our work not be stopped by SB 160. Thank you for your time and consideration.