

**Senate Judiciary Committee
Statement of Emily Coello
Wichita, Kansas
May 21, 2020**

Chairman Wilborn and Committee Members,

The negative impacts of this extended shutdown and limitations on gatherings inflicted on our children and their development are immeasurable and damaging.

Unfortunately, bogus modeling and way off predictions led to public policies rooted in fear instead of actual data on the ground. Without any evidence of infection occurring in these places or spaces, officials ordered the closing of:

- Schools
- Libraries and local literacy programs
- Churches and Sunday schools
- Kids Day Out programs (church-based toddler playtime with a Christian curriculum)
- Public parks
- Zoos
- Children's theater
- Museums (even outdoor museums)
- Pools

When Governor Kelly announced the state would not reopen on May 3, just three days before the stay at home order was to expire, parents were demoralized and outraged. Because Sedgwick County hospitalization and fatality numbers have been so low and the recovery numbers have been high, we were all blind sided by the continuation of the lockdown. There are no cases of infection occurring at a park, a library, a school, a daycare, Sunday school, or church playgroup. We stayed at home and kept hospital beds empty, which was the goal of the original stay at home order. We also learned during that time that the virus was not as fatal as predicted and those who did die had underlying health conditions. Her one size fits all approach completely missed the mark.

Governor Kelly's so-called three and a half phase plan is based on those same incorrect and doomsday models that have not proven true. In fact, as we learn more about the virus, it turns out the majority of the population is not at risk, but actual facts are seemingly lost on the Governor. Due to the uncertainty of the phased plan and the Governor's decision to push her decisions into June (or

perhaps later, as her plan only states she will make final decisions "no earlier than" said date), my son's Kid's Day Out programs preemptively cancelled their entire summer session. These programs are year round and half day/once a week. Instructors provide a loving and nurturing environment, facilitate playtime, music, reading, learning, Bible stories, arts & crafts, and valuable socialization opportunities for infants and toddlers. It is a neat development window for children, before preschool age, when their curious and developing minds take everything in like a sponge! It's been wonderful to watch him develop and these enriching programs have given him more than I ever could have at home by myself 12 hours/week. The socialization aspect of these programs has also been so valuable to his development of language, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution and problem solving. His programs at three local churches have been closed since the first week of March, which is a shame, because at this age children THRIVE on group play and learning which lead to brain development, emotional development, motor skills development, physical development, and so on. Kids Day Out programs are also major fundraisers for the churches, and their closures have been financially crippling for them.

The local library story time and reading programs for children have been cancelled since mid-March. These incredible daily and weekly programs introduce reading at a young age and lay a foundation for literacy in children from all walks of life and backgrounds. Literacy is a major factor, if not the factor, in whether a child will succeed in school, work and life. There are no reopening plans yet.

It's also upsetting the closures have kept my toddler out of Sunday school, an important part of his week where he learns about the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, Sermon on the Mount, hymns, Christ Jesus and God. He loves singing hymns, seeing his friends, and coming together to learn about God's loving kindness. It is not right that the state has kept us out of church. Some of us believe that is actually illegal. The way the closure has been implemented and justified using incorrect doomsday models, has led to many church boards being afraid to reopen in person Sunday services.

A major negative impact of the Governor's mask and so-called "social distancing" recommendations is on the emotional development of our children. Children are innocent and impressionable and this symbol of fear teaches them to be afraid of the air and of being around other people. There is no scientific evidence that masks, either homemade or N-95, stop the spread of this type of infection, yet the Governor has required workers in certain industries to wear a mask at work. She has encouraged everyone else to wear a mask outside of the home. Masks are scary and the prevalence of this symbol of fear will have long term effects much deeper and worse than anyone can predict, especially in school

age children. My son repeatedly tells me throughout the day "I don't like masks" and it breaks my heart that this is a daily theme of his life these days whether we're at the store, in the car or on a walk.

So-called "social distancing," is a made up concept and arbitrary distance based on presumption, NOT science. There is no scientific evidence that keeping six feet between people, even in outdoor spaces, prevents this infection or death. This untested presumption is the basis for keeping Kansans out of church, work, school and restaurants. Teaching our children, whether directly or indirectly, not to hug relatives or friends, stand next to teachers, sit in a movie theater with moviegoers, or sit with a librarian during story time will lead to fear, anxiety and other emotional trauma. The mental health effects will also be damaging in the long term.

Based on doomsday predictions and non-scientific data promoted by Governor Kelly, The Wichita River Festival prematurely cancelled its June festival before we understood the virus or the actual risks. It's a week of family and community outdoor activities that are fun and celebrate city pride, which we will have to wait another year to enjoy.

I hope the Kansas State Fair is not influenced by the incorrect information being promoted by Governor Kelly and continues planning for 2020. It's an event my family looks forward to annually and it's a wonderful educational opportunity for children and students.

Enough is enough. Happy and healthy children see their friends, go to school, play at the park, learn to swim, attend Sunday school, and learn to love books at the library. An unintended consequence of the shutdown and its prolongment is the stunting of child development and robbing our sweet children of the chance to be kids.

Fear is more contagious than any virus and it is time to let kids be kids again. It is NOT the government's role to keep us inside, out of school, or to threaten us with fines or license revocations. Please get out of the way and let us take it from here.

Very Respectfully,
Emily Coello
Stay at home mother
Wichita, Kansas