

Andy Marso
Overland Park resident
Bacterial meningitis survivor

Re: Written-only testimony in opposition to House Bill 2498; Feb. 16, 2022

Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,
Thank you for allowing me to testify in opposition to House Bill 2498 as a concerned citizen who knows firsthand the value of vaccination.

I have been an advocate for vaccination since 2004, when I contracted a vaccine-preventable disease — bacterial meningitis — as a senior at KU. I was a healthy 22-year-old until one day when I went to bed thinking I had the flu. The next morning I couldn't get out of bed. I would have died in my room if my friends hadn't carried me to a car and drove me to a doctor. Within hours I was airlifted to KU Hospital in critical condition, with multiple organs failing. I spent a month in a medically-induced coma while doctors battled the infection and saved my life. When I regained consciousness, I realized that I couldn't move my hands and feet. The meningococcal bacteria had cut off circulation to my extremities and my fingers and toes were slowly dying while still attached to my body.

I spent the whole summer in the hospital, enduring excruciating treatments to save my arms and legs. I also had surgeries to amputate all of my toes and all but one of my fingers.

Then I spent more than a year in rehab, doing extensive physical and occupational therapy so I could learn to walk again, shower again, feed myself and go to the bathroom on my own.

My medical bills ran to about \$1.5 million. All to treat a disease that can usually be prevented with a shot that costs \$150.

Here's why I oppose HB 2498:

HB 2498 is based on anti-vaccine hysteria. The chances of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment requiring COVID-19 vaccines for school attendance in the foreseeable future are slim to none, and Slim just left town.

So, in the short-term you're not actually preventing anything with this bill. But in the long-term, do you really think it's a good idea to tie KDHE's hands on this one disease...

- No matter what new COVID variants emerge,
- No matter how those new variants affect kids (whose hospitalizations increased dramatically after omicron).
- No matter what new COVID vaccines are approved (e.g., Novavax, or the pan-coronavirus vaccine developed by the U.S. Army that's currently in clinical trials),
- No matter what the safety and efficacy data for those vaccines show, and
- No matter who is governor (and by extension, KDHE secretary)?

I don't think it is a good idea. This bill is like buying napalm to kill a bug that doesn't live anywhere in your region, but would actually be beneficial for your ecosystem if it did in the future.

Andy Marso
Overland Park