

February 22, 2021

Dear Chair Olson and Members of the Senate Committee on Commerce:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 213. My name is Shelby Ostrom, and I am the program director for the Mid America Immunization Coalition, serving Johnson and Wyandotte Counties in Kansas. In my role at the Mid America Immunization Coalition, I work with our community to educate and advocate for the importance of all vaccinations. But, I am also writing this testimony as a concerned Kansan.

With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading rapidly in Kansas, employers have a right to keep their employees safe from vaccine preventable diseases, particularly in high risk locations like hospitals and community health. Enacting Senate Bill 213 would set a dangerous precedent for other bills that could potentially limit the power employers have in protecting their employees during current and future public health crises.

A good friend of mine is a pediatric nurse at a local hospital in Kansas. In her role, she provides critical care to children effected by epilepsy who cannot afford to go anywhere else. In her role during the pandemic, she was exposed at two different times to COVID-19. Because of the nature of her work, she had to quarantine for a total of 4 weeks without pay, preventing her from providing that critical care to vulnerable children. If the vaccine for COVID-19 had been available and mandated by her hospital, as many other vaccines are, she would have been 90% immune to the disease, preventing her from having to quarantine.

If Senate Bill 213 were to pass, it would make hospitals places of increased infection rather than healing, potentially exposing dozens of high-risk patients to vaccine preventable diseases.

We owe it to this astounding group of people, who have worked tirelessly for us throughout 2020 and beyond, to allow their employers to protect them.

Thank you.