



**Senate Committee on Education
February 16, 2022**

**Sarah Irsik-Good, Board Member
Immunize Kansas Coalition**

Chair Baumgardner, Vice Chair Erickson, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Immunize Kansas Coalition this written testimony is **submitted in opposition of Senate Bill 496**, as currently written.

At face value, the Parental Bill of Rights seems to be a win-win. After all, I'm a parent, and I certainly understand the desire to protect our children and ensure parents are in the driver's seat as it relates to their education and overall well-being. However, it is important that you, as legislators, understand any unintended consequences that may result from the passage of this bill as it is written. Specifically, section (c)(6) (page 1 lines 30-32) would essentially eliminate the current required vaccinations for schools and childcare facilities through providing a quasi-philosophical exemption. Current Kansas law requires children attending childcare facilities or K-12 schools to receive certain wellness vaccines for certain diseases, and only recognizes medical or religious exemptions. It's important to note that over the last 2 legislative sessions, some version of this proposal has been attempted through several different pieces of legislation in both the house and the senate; and each time the attempt has been unsuccessful, and for good reason.

Vaccinations are among the greatest achievements of public health. The current childhood vaccination schedule protects against many diseases that once claimed the lives of thousands each year in the U.S. By removing this requirement, SB 496 risks those successes we've achieved to date. Since the 1940's, as new vaccines are introduced, the incidence of infectious diseases that once affected thousands of Americans have plummeted. Polio and rubella are gone in the US; diphtheria is rare, whereas it used to kill up to 15,000 Americans per year¹.

Vaccinations have significantly decreased rates of vaccine-preventable diseases protecting the lives and health of Kansans from once-common diseases. However, "historical amnesia" of the consequences of vaccine-preventable diseases have fueled vaccine hesitancy over the years. As a result, measles is now resurgent in the US. As the most highly transmissible vaccine preventable illness, measles is sensitive to changes in herd immunity and the impact of vaccine refusal. In September of 2019, the US was at risk of losing measles elimination status due to several large-scale outbreaks and 10 years of increasing incidence². It is important that we don't forget what the US looked like pre-polio vaccination. It is undisputable that vaccines are safe and currently given to millions of children each year. Side effects are generally minor and temporary; serious reactions are very rare. The United States vaccine safety program closely and constantly monitors the safety of vaccines.

Considering the preponderance of evidence to support childhood vaccines, Kansas voters overwhelmingly support the current practice. A recent Statewide Survey conducted by Nurture KC and Public Opinion Strategies from January 27th through February 3rd of this year found that there is strong agreement across partisan lines that wellness vaccines are

¹ Richard Conniff, "The world before vaccines is a world we can't afford to forget," *National Geographic* (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/cannot-forget-world-before-vaccines>

² Kristen Feemster & Clair Szipszky, "Resurgence of measles in the United States: How did we get here?", *Curr Opin Pediatr*, 2020 Feb;32(1):139-144. doi:10.1097/MOP.0000000000000845; Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31790030/>

a good thing. Specifically, 91% of all voters surveyed support the existing wellness vaccine requirements for children attending childcare facilities or K-12 schools in Kansas. Further, the majority of voters in every political group, disagree that we should add another wellness vaccine exemption based on philosophical objections³. Childhood vaccines are decades old. They are safe and they are effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our concern. In summary, we **oppose SB 496**, as it is currently written. It is vitally important to maintain the status quo as it relates to required wellness vaccines for childcare and K-12 schools.

Sarah Irsik-Good, Board Member

Immunize Kansas Coalition

³ Kansas Statewide Survey: How do Kansans feel about vaccines? <https://nurturekc.org/solutions/immunization/#survey>