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Senate Committee on Education
Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 496 - Written Only

Chair Baumgardner and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on Senate Bill 496. My specific concern is with the language stating that parents would have “the right to make healthcare and medical decisions for such child, including the right to make decisions regarding vaccinations and immunizations.” While likely well-intentioned, it seems this would have the effect of eliminating long-standing vaccine requirements for school entry.

It is important to maintain the vaccines required for school entry. These vaccine requirements are a critical tool to protect our children from avoidable disease and suffering. Vaccines work. In the 1950s, polio caused more than 15,000 cases of paralysis each year in the U.S. In 2019, there were no cases of polio at all. This can be attributed to a highly successful campaign to vaccinate Americans.

Vaccine requirements are necessary to provide a safe schooling environment for all children and their teachers, but particularly those with chronic disease or who are immunocompromised. When students get the required vaccines, they not only protect themselves from infectious disease, but also their classmates and teachers.

Additionally, within current policy, appropriate mechanisms exist for parents to excuse their child from vaccine requirements when necessary. Kansas offers both a medical exemption and a religious exemption. Eliminating vaccine requirements for school entry or expanding current exemptions, would needlessly increase the number of Kansas kids - and their teachers - at risk for preventable disease.

Lastly, polling information was released last week by the non-profit organization Nurture KC. These polls found that Kansas voters do not want to eliminate the current vaccine requirements. Specifically, their polling found that 95 percent of Kansas voters believe that taking vaccines for diseases like measles, mumps and polio is extremely or very important to maintaining good health. Additionally, more than 9 out of 10 Kansas voters support wellness vaccine requirements for children to attend K-12 schools or childcare facilities.

Please strike language related to vaccines and immunizations from this bill. Vaccines work. Vaccines contribute to a safe learning environment for children. Kansas voters do not support changes to the wellness vaccine requirements for school or childcare entry.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions regarding the information shared today, please feel free to contact me at davidembers23@gmail.com.