



*Sedgwick County...
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Health Department

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Adrienne Byrne
Health Director

Testimony by Adrienne Byrne with the Sedgwick County Health Department to
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
Written-Only Opponent for SB 489 • March 8, 2022

Chairman Hilderbrand and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to supply written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 489 regarding infectious and contagious diseases and the powers of the secretary of health and environment and local health officers.

My department has several concerns with this bill.

The bill adjusts K.S.A. 65-101 and K.S.A. 65-128, removing the ability for the Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) to take action to prevent the introduction and/or spread of infectious/contagious diseases within Kansas and moving the responsibility for the Secretary of KDHE to designate which diseases are infectious/contagious to providing a report with recommendations to the Kansas House Speaker and Senate President. A proper public health system must rely on those with public health expertise to make crucial decisions to protect the health and safety of Kansans. As such, we are very troubled by what appears to be the politicization of disease decision-making and we worry this move could put lives at risk from political considerations not related to what is best for the health and safety of Kansans.

The bill modifies K.S.A. 65-119, removing the ability for a county or joint board of health or the local health officer from prohibiting public gatherings when necessary for the control of an infectious/contagious diseases. When dealing with person-to-person disease transmission limiting exposure is key to protecting the public's health. My department's local board of health and local health officer seriously consider whether prohibiting public gatherings is warranted. It is a serious step but we need the power to activate it should the need arise. This bill would compromise our ability to protect our area's residents and could result in uncontrolled disease spread, overwhelming our hospitals and first responders.

The Sedgwick County Health Department believes SB 489 is bad public policy and puts the lives of Kansans at risk. Today's interconnected world is global in nature and disease spread can happen fast. We need to be ready. As such, we oppose SB 489 and ask that the committee not recommend it for passage.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Byrne, Health Director
Sedgwick County Health Department