

Testimony by Karla Nichols with the Reno 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.

Our biggest concern revolves around the modification to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) Secretary's powers in K.S.A. 65-101 and K.S.A. 65-128.

Our department relies on the expertise and decision-making from KDHE in terms of assessing which diseases should be officially designated as infectious or contagious, and for KDHE to take the lead in actions to prevent such diseases from coming into Kansas, or once arriving, spreading amongst our residents. But designating diseases as infectious or contagious should be at the state level and in the hands of public health experts. The current process has worked for decades. We are greatly concerned SB 489 injects politics into what should be an apolitical process and do not like the proposed modification in K.S.A. 65-128 to hand this responsibility over to the Kansas Legislature.

In addition, the changes to K.S.A. 65-101 are troubling. Kansas public health is a decentralized system and departments like mine are the front line on preventing disease spread. We deserve, and have, a lot of authority to decide what courses of action are best when addressing infectious and contagious diseases. However, diseases do not respect geopolitical borders. It is critical KDHE also have a role in prevention strategies, as that is the sole agency charged with overseeing the health of the entire state.

The Reno County Health Department believes SB 489 is bad public policy and puts the lives of Kansans at risk by taking a key public health decision-making out of public health's hands. Today's interconnected world is global in nature and disease spread can happen fast. We need to be ready, and we need a process that is as apolitical as possible to achieve that goal. As such, we oppose SB 489 and ask that the committee not recommend it for passage.

Sincerely,



Director, Karla Nichols, MHSA, FACHE

