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Testimony by Shalei Shea with the McPherson 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. McPherson County Health Department serves our community by functioning as the referral hub for resources in our communities and by offering reproductive health services, Women, Infant and Child (WIC) services, adult and childhood immunizations, contagious disease investigation and prevention education, emergency preparedness education, and breastfeeding resources.

Our biggest concern is the modification of 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. McPherson County's Board of Health and Health Officer take prohibiting public gatherings seriously and do not warrant such limitations unless it is absolutely critical. It is a serious step that we hope to never use 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. There are lessons to be learned with public health policy following the COVID-19 pandemic, yes. However, making changes such as this to all contagious disease response is not a correct move. As you know, Kansas is a decentralized state. Moving forward with this modification will take away the ability to respond to our local communities needs appropriately, which is granted to us by being a decentralized state. The ability to analyze and respond to contagious disease spread in our individual communities is important. There is not a one-size-fits-all response.

McPherson County Health Department believes SB 489 is bad public policy and puts the lives of Kansans at risk by taking a key health protection strategy out of local government's hands. 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,

Shalei Shea RN BSN
Director and Health Officer
McPherson County Health Department