

Testimony of D. Charles Hunt, M.P.H., Johnson County Department of Health and Environment  
To the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare  
Opponent on SB 6 | February 13, 2023

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee:

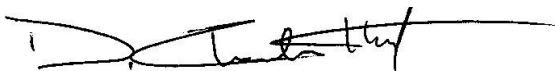
Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 6 regarding restrictions on the authority of the secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and local health officers to prevent the introduction and spread of infectious or contagious diseases. We are concerned that, if Senate Bill 6 were enacted, our ability as a local health department to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases would be greatly diminished, thereby putting the community, particularly those most vulnerable, at greater risk. I would like to highlight several areas of concern.

- SB 6 modifies K.S.A. 65-118 to remove teachers and school administrators from those required to report suspected cases of infectious or contagious diseases. Schools are often the site for outbreaks of infectious diseases. Our health department, like others across the state, works closely with school administrators and school nurses to ensure infectious disease cases and outbreaks are reported promptly so mitigation measures can be implemented.
- SB 6 modifies K.S.A. 65-119 and takes away the ability of the county board of health or the local health officer to prohibit public gatherings, when necessary, for disease control.
- SB 6 modifies K.S.A. 65-128(b) to remove the ability of the secretary of KDHE to specify the medically necessary and reasonable requirements to prevent the spread of diseases injurious to public health, including isolation and quarantine of individuals afflicted with or exposed to such diseases.
- The bill also modifies K.S.A. 65-129(b) such that local health officers can no longer order individuals who have been exposed to an infectious or contagious disease to seek appropriate and necessary evaluation and treatment or go into isolation and quarantine. Without such requirements in place, it could result in children in childcare facilities and schools, and others in the community, being placed at higher risk of exposure to dangerous infectious diseases.

It is important to note that HB 2016, enacted during the 2020 Special Session, implemented additional measures to ensure elected officials have clear oversight on the orders of local health officers. SB 6 appears as an attempt to circumvent that local oversight and just outright remove the abilities of the local health officers and county boards of health to prevent and control infectious diseases.

Protecting the health and safety of Kansans is our top priority, and the ability to prevent the spread of infectious and contagious diseases is a critical approach to achieving that priority. SB 6 undermines this by changing the role of the local health officer substantially, depleting it of the authority to combat disease. As such, the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment opposes SB 6.

Sincerely,



Deputy Director/Interim Director, Johnson County Department of Health and Environment