

March 19, 2023

Chairwoman Gossage and Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee Members:

Thank you for bringing SB315 to committee for a vote. I am so appreciative of the opportunity to speak as a proponent of this bill as it is near and dear to my heart as a mother and as a doctor.

My son, Andrew Perry, a nursing student in good standing was kicked out of his nursing program three semesters prior to graduation when his university denied both his religious and medical exemptions for the Covid 19 vaccine. The obvious question is why should my healthy twenty- two year old son who had already had Covid, be asked to take a vaccine that offered him no benefit and only potential harm especially being in the highest risk group for myocarditis. If there is risk there must be choice. It is the health profession's duty to provide full informed consent and respect individuals right of conscience in regards to bodily autotomy which is at the foundation of medical ethics. His medical exemption form even stated that he could only be exempted from the Covid vaccine if he had had a prior history of anaphylaxis to other vaccines or had ALREADY had myocarditis from a previous Covid vaccine! I shutter at what message this was sending to those future nursing students who would be caring from patients in the future. Do they not need to understand the fundamentals of informed consent and medical ethics?

Our hope was to bring him home, as he had been attending a Christian University in Iowa, and take advantage of the religious exemption law passed during the Kansas special summer session to protect Andrew in order to complete his nursing education. After talking to the Attorney General's office, we were quite disappointed to be told that this law did not apply to college students. We were additionally shocked to find that some universities in the state of Kansas, for example MidAmerica Nazarene University were not even providing a religious/medical exemption process for their nursing students hence leaving those students without any advocacy with the clinical sites. The clinical training sites would not provide an exemption process either, as nursing students were seen as visitors and not employees. What were these students suppose to do?

I spoke directly with the Brie Cantrell, RN who coordinates nursing student clinical rotation in the Kansas City area hospitals who confirmed that some schools were opting not to provide an exemption process at all for their nursing students (Rockhurst was another example in the KC area). Even months later after an official form was created by Children's Mercy Hospital to accept religious/medical exemptions from schools who were providing a religious exemption process, some clinical sites still refused to allow students to rotate despite this form being available. This disruption in nursing student training occurred despite the severe nursing shortage and despite the knowledge that the COVID vaccine could not stop transmission. Why was this happening?

A more recent conversation with the Director of Undergraduate Nursing Programs at Wichita State noted there was a lengthy debate with their General Council and hospital partners about who should approve these exemptions. The General Council was not in favor of the school's approving them and felt the hospitals should exempt students based on their criteria. Additionally, the university had preferred that the school be hands-off with student's medical and religious information but it ended up that the nursing program took on the exemption process. This is a perfect example of why this law is needs to pass as it appears that the best interest of institutions is likely superseding what is in the best interest of students who are left vulnerable. Students are left with the choice of either submitting to a medical intervention they may have a right of conscience objection to in order to finish their training or they have to change their major.

Andrew was deposed for **seven** hours on March 6th with questions directed at his sincerely held religious beliefs as part of a lawsuit he brought against his university. He has moved to Florida to complete his nursing degree which will take a total of six years rather than four to complete. Was this necessary for him or our family? NO! SB 315 must be passed into law!! This bill is solely about medical freedom – simply having a CHOICE about what you do with your own BODY as dictated by your own CONSCIENCE without coercion or reprisal.

Sincerely, Gayln Perry, M.D.

Overland Park, Johnson County, Kansas Senate District: 8

