



February 15, 2024

Heather Braum, Health Policy Advisor
Kansas Action for Children
Verbal Testimony in Opposition to SB 391
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chairperson Gossage and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 391, which would weaken laws at the local and state levels for responding to infectious disease outbreaks, including eliminating several laws related to public health quarantines.

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

We oppose this bill due to the growing concern over measles outbreaks occurring in our state.¹ That is because allowing disease to freely spread quickly gets costly – and harms our children.

During a 2018 and 2019 measles outbreak in Washington state resulting in 72 infections, the public health response to the outbreak cost approximately \$2.3 million.² The investigators estimated that if no isolation or quarantine measures had been required (which could happen under SB 391), the outbreak would have resulted in an additional 1,296 cases and 72,198 contacts, **thus increasing the cost of the public health response to over \$120 million.**

A more recent outbreak of measles in Ohio found that out of 85 known cases (almost all of whom were young, unvaccinated children – some of whom were too young to be vaccinated), 44 experienced complications like ear infections, diarrhea, and pneumonia. **Of**

¹ Kekatos, M., & Benadjaoud, Y. (2024 Jan. 18). "Measles outbreaks are occurring in some pockets of the US. Here's why doctors are concerned." ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/measles-outbreaks-occurring-pockets-us-doctors-concerned/story?id=106440080>

² Pike, J., Melnick, A., Gastañaduy, P. A., Kay, M., Harbison, J., Leidner, A.J., Rice, S., Asato, K., Schwartz, L., and DeBolt, C. (2021). "Societal Costs of a Measles Outbreak." *Pediatrics*. 147(4). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-027037>

those 44, 36 were hospitalized, mainly due to dehydration.³ Other complications from measles were not reported from this outbreak, but the disease is known to cause blindness, irreparable brain damage, immune amnesia,⁴ and even death.⁵

Vaccines and quarantines are the best tools to stopping the spread of measles and other infectious diseases like polio and whooping cough. SB 391 would prevent the state and local officials from fully utilizing these tools.

With growing reports of measles infections and Kansas' average measles vaccination uptake for kindergarteners through the 2022-2023 school year (91 percent)⁶ below the recommended 95 percent uptake threshold for preventing outbreaks,⁷ SB 391 would allow measles (and other diseases that could strike) to run rampant through our state, costing us countless dollars, taking parents away from work, and overrunning our health care system by causing life-long complications and even killing children.

While most of the population is vaccinated against these diseases, **some children are too young to receive standard immunizations.** Outbreaks must be quickly stopped through infectious disease outbreak response tools before children become hospitalized, end up with lifelong health complications, or die from these diseases, as what happened to the daughter of children's author Roald Dahl in 1962.⁸ Our state and local officials have an interest in preventing the spread of disease. SB 391 would prevent them from carrying out this goal.

For all these reasons, we respectfully request the Committee to oppose SB 391 and instead work to maintain the health and safety of our state's children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony in opposition to SB 391. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at heather@kac.org.

³ Tiller, E. C., et al. (2023, August 4). "Notes from the Field: Measles Outbreak – Central Ohio, 2022–2023." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 72:31: 847-849. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7231a3.htm>

⁴ Frederick, E. (2019). "How measles causes the body to 'forget' past infections by other microbes." *Science* <https://www.science.org/content/article/how-measles-causes-body-forget-past-infections-other-microbes>

⁵ CDC. (2020). *Complications of Measles*. <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/symptoms/complications.html>

⁶ KDHE. (n.d.). *Kindergarten Immunization Data*. <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/2016/Kindergarten-Immunization-Data>

⁷ Stock, S., Zalani, A., Hacker, C., & Sanchez, J. (2024 Jan. 30). "U.S. Data shows at least 8,500 U.S. schools at greater risk of measles outbreaks as vaccination rates decline." *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/measles-outbreaks-schools-vaccination-rates-decline/>

⁸ Dahl, R. (1986). *Measles: A Dangerous Illness*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210119164126/https://www.roalddahl.com/roald-dahl/timeline/1960s/november-1962>