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Healthy People Build Strong Communities

Testimony by Dennis Kriesel with the Kansas Association of Local Health Departments (KALHD) to

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

In-Person Opponent for SB 6 • February 13, 2023

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today 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. KALHD is a nonprofit association dedicated to strengthening local health departments for the purpose of improving and protecting the health of all Kansans.

KALHD has a multitude of concerns with SB 6 and the negative impacts it could have. Two in particular:

- SB 6 modifies K.S.A. 65-119 removes the ability of the county/joint board of health, or the local health officer, to prohibit public gatherings when necessary to control infectious and contagious diseases.
- SB 6 modifies K.S.A. 65-129b so 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 (instead making those mere recommendations).

Fundamentally, we are concerned at this removal of local control, reducing the local health officer to an advisory capacity and removing a lot of local elected official control (as county commissioners in almost all instances are the local board of health). As a reminder, the Kansas Legislature during the 2020 Special Session via HB 2016 established a clear chain of authority to elected county commissioners, modifying K.S.A. 65-201 and K.S.A. 65-202 so that the commission could review, amend, or revoke local health officer orders that the commission disagrees with. As such, elected official review is already codified over the local health officers.

These SB 6 changes undermine the authority of those county commissioners and how they choose to work with their local health officer. Instead, critical decisions such as isolation are up to the individual who is sick. This is a recipe for disaster when it comes to disease spread. It suggests that, no matter how dangerous a disease is, an individual, including those known to be infected, has the right to expose others to their illness.

KALHD believes these changes would make disease control nearly impossible in Kansas, and thus would put the health and safety of Kansans at risk. We oppose SB 6 in its entirety and ask the committee not recommend it for passage.

Thank you, I will stand for questions.

Sincerely,

Dennis Kriesel

Executive Director, Kansas Association of Local Health Departments