

Testimony of Jonna Upson with the Hamilton County Health Department 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 supply 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. As a local health department, we are very concerned with the ability to control and prevent disease spread in our community.

Two of the major areas of concern we have are:

- 1) Changes to K.S.A. 65-118. This removes teachers and school administrators from those required to report if a person is suffering from, or has died from, an infectious or contagious disease. Schools are a notable mass gathering location in many counties and given the proximity of students to each other often prime ground for diseases to spread. Catching outbreaks early is key to stopping them and thus it makes a lot of sense to have schools as a required reporter. School reporting is critical to protecting the health of children and should remain.
- 2) Changes to K.S.A. 65-119. This 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. When outbreaks occur, sometimes temporarily shutting down certain public gatherings is a critical means to prevent a disease from continuing to spread. This is particularly so for diseases that lack a pharmaceutical intervention and are difficult to prevent the spread of via straightforward means (e.g., hand washing). Removing the ability to prohibit such gatherings will endanger lives and thus we feel this statute should not be modified.

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 reducing the required reporters when it comes to the school setting and stripping the ability to prohibit public gatherings when necessary. Both changes would put the health and safety of Kansans at risk. As such, the Hamilton County Health Department opposes SB 6.

Sincerely,

Jonna Upson RN, Health Office, Nurse Administrator
Hamilton County Health Department