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Stafford County Health Department

Testimony on SB 391

Submitted To

The Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

By

Shannon Snyder, RN/Director

Stafford County Health Department

February 15, 2024

On behalf of the Stafford County Health Department and the citizens of our county, I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony on Senate Bill 391. We are an opponent of this bill.

Proposed as the Constitutional Right to Health Freedom Act, this bill seeks to limit or eliminate, the duties of the Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KHDE), the county or joint board of health, and the local health officer, in responding to any infectious or contagious disease. In doing so, their primary response to such infectious or contagious diseases would be to make recommendations.

As a local health department, we are very concerned with the ability to control and prevent disease spread in our community. 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. Use of isolation, quarantine, and prohibition of public gatherings are decisions that are never made lightly or without careful consideration of, both, the impacted individual, and the broader community. And eliminating the authority of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), our county board of health and our local health officer to utilize these tools, when other options are not likely to prevent further spread of infectious or contagious diseases, will place others at increased risk.

We are concerned that by taking the responsibility of these decisions away from health professionals that are well versed on infections and contagious disease and placing it in the hands of persons without this training it could be detrimental to the health and safety of our communities. Decisions on responses to these kinds of illnesses are never taken lightly and having the professional knowledge assists in the planning and implementation of the scale of response necessary. It is also important to understand that every community in Kansas functions differently because of the vast differences in urban versus frontier counties. Letting the professionals in each community take care of their response allows for them to take this into consideration.

As a health department we share with you the responsibility for the health and safety of everyone in our community. A responsibility we also share with our appointing authorities on our local boards of county commissioners and our partners at KDHE. I urge you to take no further action on this or any similar bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion.

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Shannon Snyder, RN/Director