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Kansas Action for Children
Written-only Testimony in opposition to SB 315
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 315. 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.

SB 315 would make it much easier for anyone (adult or child) to receive an exemption from *any* vaccine requirement for basically any reason at work, child care, or K-12 schools and indicates that the beliefs are not to be questioned. SB 315 also removes the meningitis vaccine requirement for living in student housing at Kansas universities and colleges.

SB 315 is an extremely dangerous bill that would irrevocably harm the health of Kansas kids and communities. We have current vaccine requirements for a reason, and an already existing exemption process for childhood vaccines that works.

We honestly ask, why is SB 315 needed? What existing problem is it trying to address? We have public health-related requirements – like those associated with vaccines – for a reason. Infectious diseases do not care about people's choices or beliefs. When these diseases spread, they put our most vulnerable – children too young to be vaccinated, those with medical conditions that prevent them from receiving certain vaccines, immunocompromised community members, and the elderly – at particular high risk for infection, hospitalization, life-long complications, and even death.

Businesses may require certain vaccines for workplace safety reasons or in a health care setting. Just one person opting out of a vaccine may jeopardize the entire workplace and the patients a health care worker cares for.

Vaccine requirements in child care centers keep parents at work and child care businesses open. Functional child care facilities and schools literally make Kansas work. And when vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks occur, they overwhelm our health systems and close

businesses. Additionally, containing an outbreak after it has begun to spread in the community costs millions of dollars.¹²

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, “when immunization rates are high, herd immunity develops and limits the spread of the disease, which helps protect those who cannot be vaccinated.”³ Limiting disease is good for children, families, businesses, and the entire state. When even a few more people refuse to vaccinate their children, they put everyone in their community at risk of dangerous diseases. SB 315 would make it much easier for people to opt-out of vaccine requirements.

SB 315 would alter the current vaccine requirements and would jeopardize kids’ health. **We urge the Committee to keep Kansas kids and communities safe by opposing SB 315.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share our strong opposition to SB 315. Please do not hesitate to contact me at heather@kac.org if you have any questions.

¹ Pike, J., Leidner, A. J., & Gastañaduy, P. (2020). A review of measles outbreak cost estimates from the United States in the postelimination era (2004-2017): Estimates by perspective and cost type. *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 71(6): 1568-1576. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa070>

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

³ National Conference of State Legislatures. (2017). Vaccination policies: requirements and exemptions for entering school. *NCSL Legisbrief*, 25(48):1-2.