



Kansas House Passes Child Care Bill with Troubling Last-Minute Change to Vaccination Exemptions

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TOPEKA — Yesterday, the Kansas House passed HB 2294, which includes a concerning expansion of the existing religious beliefs vaccination exemption for child care spaces, where religious beliefs is now defined as "includes, but not limited to, theistic and non-theistic moral and ethical beliefs as to what is right and wrong that are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views." This language change is a major departure from existing state law and is considered a de facto philosophical beliefs exemption.

The Immunize Kansas Coalition, which exists to protect Kansans from vaccine-preventable diseases, is very disappointed this provision was not removed from the bill before its passage by the House (this change wasn't even mentioned in the much too brief floor debate!), especially now as Kansas is facing a significant measles outbreak. Our youngest children in childcare settings — sometimes too young to be vaccinated yet for diseases like measles -- are most at risk for complications from infectious diseases, and they rely on everyone around them to keep them safe. This language change will result in more people easily opting out of vaccination requirements, leading to further declines in already concerning vaccination rates.

IKC chair, Dr. Brandan Kennedy, MD, board-certified licensed pediatrician said, "we're dismayed by this; not only the provision itself, but the way in which this amendment was put into the bill in the Commerce committee, completely bypassing the Health committee, without any input from medical experts, and without the public having an opportunity to weigh in. We also question why the further implications of this legislation beyond the serious medical concerns, including the cost of hospital stays, parent time off of work, lost income to businesses, not to mention the lifetime health impacts for patients, were not considered. This provision in HB2294 is simply bad public health policy and Kansas children will be harmed by it."

He added, "Every pediatrician I've spoken with about this bill is worried. This current measles outbreak across multiple states including Kansas is serious. Measles is one of the most contagious diseases we know of. Our state currently does not have the vaccination rates needed to keep outbreaks in check. We are at about 90% according to data from the CDC 2023-2024, and 95% or higher is what is needed. Unfortunately, we are now seeing the consequences of this here in Kansas."

If HB 2294 must continue to move forward, IKC strongly urges lawmakers to reconsider rapidly moving ahead with this change to longstanding Kansas vaccination law. Pause and seek more information and input, especially from the medical community and concerned parents, to fully understand the risks of making this change that will impact our youngest Kansans. The Legislature must weigh all concerns and collect all the information before a significant decision like this becomes law.

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Immunize Kansas Coalition is a group of Kansas providers, health department officials, researchers and educators working together to improve vaccine rates and protect Kansans against vaccine-preventable diseases. For more information, visit immunizekansascoalition.org.