



## Kansas Legislature Passes Child Care Bill with Troubling Changes to Vaccination Exemptions

**\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\***

**April 14, 2025**

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TOPEKA – During veto session, the Kansas Legislature passed [HB 2045](#) (formerly HB 2294), which includes a provision significantly broadening the religious exemption for vaccinations in child care settings. The bill redefines religious beliefs using language from a [2021 law](#) originally intended for adult COVID-19 vaccine exemptions. This new definition includes “theistic and non-theistic moral and ethical beliefs... sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views,” effectively creating a philosophical beliefs exemption for child care vaccine requirements.

“We’re dismayed by this action, and are disturbed by the lack of public discussion for such a consequential policy change,” said Immunize Kansas Coalition (IKC) chair, Dr. Brandan Kennedy, MD, board-certified licensed pediatrician. “The vaccine changes in this legislation are simply bad public health policy and Kansas children will be harmed by it.

“Any policy that relaxes requirements for vaccination of all children for all vaccine-preventable diseases will result in our whole Kansas community being left more vulnerable to these very serious infections. Our current measles outbreak is only a small example of what happens when vaccination rates drop with cases continuing to increase now with over 30 cases.”

The legislation raises particular concern for young children in child care settings who are too young to be vaccinated and are especially vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. Easing exemption access will further reduce vaccination rates and increase outbreaks.

“We also question the further implications of this legislation beyond the serious medical concerns including the cost of hospital stays, parents’ time off of work, and lost income to businesses, not to mention the lifetime health impacts for patients which were not considered,” Dr. Kennedy said.

The vaccine-related language was added by a non-health committee, without public hearings or debate, and then there were no hearings or debate on the Senate side. Instead, the bill was sent to conference committee. There was an attempt in conference to revert back to current law in child care settings for vaccine exemptions, citing concerns about the ongoing measles outbreak centered in his legislative district. The amendment was rejected by the conference committee.

Dr. Kennedy concluded, “As a pediatrician, what I fear the most is seeing children hospitalized, profoundly ill, some in critical condition, and some who may not survive their illness because the leadership in our state failed to consider the potential terrible human toll and economic consequences of this policy change without public review by medical experts in our state.”

IKC urges legislators and the governor to pause and seek further input from medical professionals and parents to avoid endangering Kansas children and public health before putting this legislation into law, and instead prioritize policies and funding mechanisms that increase vaccination rates and access across our state.

*Immunize Kansas Coalition is a group of Kansas healthcare providers, public health professionals, researchers, and educators working together to improve vaccine rates and protect Kansans against vaccine-preventable diseases.*

*For more information, visit [www.immunizekansascoalition.org](http://www.immunizekansascoalition.org).*