



K A N S A S

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**Testimony on House Bill 2396
Regarding Meningococcal Disease Vaccinations
House Committee on Health and Human Services**

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Chairman Morrison and Members of the Committee, I am Dr. Howard Rodenberg, Director of the KDHE Division of Health and State Health Officer. We appreciate this opportunity to discuss with you legislation that addresses what we believe to be an important public health issue. House Bill 2396 is intended to protect college students from meningitis infection by requiring students to either receive the meningitis vaccine or sign a waiver indicating they know their increased risk of contracting the disease.

Meningitis is an infection of the meninges, thin tissue coverings that line the spinal canal and the brain. Different organisms, including both viruses and bacteria, can cause meningitis. The type of meningitis we refer to today is caused by a bacteria, *Neisseria meningitidis*, which can be found in many healthy people. For unknown reasons, some individuals develop meningitis when exposed to this bacterium through contact with respiratory or throat secretions (coughing, kissing, etc). The resulting illness can be severe; 10%-15% of cases die. Among those that survive, an additional 10%-15% may suffer serious long-term effects (including mental retardation, loss of limbs, and hearing loss). Everyone has a small chance of contracting this type of meningitis, but epidemiologic studies have demonstrated that those who live in college dormitories are at increased risk, apparently due to the close contact among residents.

Although there are antibiotics that can treat a *Neisseria meningitidis* infection, mortality and complication rates remain high. Steps can be taken to prevent the disease. A vaccine protects against all but one of the most important strains of the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacterium. In the event a person becomes ill, those with very close contact to the ill

person's respiratory/throat secretions are treated. Family members, roommates, boyfriends, girlfriends, etc. are given antibiotics to prevent them from becoming ill.

Relatively few people contract this type of meningitis every year in the United States. In 2002, less than one person per 100,000 contracted this disease. The rate of disease per year among Kansans was similarly low -- 8 total cases were reported in 2002, 6 in 2003, and 4 in 2004. However, the mortality of the disease, the fact that it is transmitted easily and rapidly in an epidemic fashion, and the availability of a preventive vaccine dictate that we aggressively address this issue. A United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation in May of 2005 that children 11 – 12 years old, previously unvaccinated adolescents at high school entry, and college freshmen living in dormitories all receive meningitis vaccination further underscores the import of this measure.

In September of 2005, the Kansas Board of Regents approved a policy requiring the six state universities to establish policies and procedures that would require all incoming students residing in university housing to be vaccinated for meningitis or to sign a waiver indicating that they decline to take the vaccine. This policy is to be effective beginning with the Fall 2006 academic semester.

HB 2396 would ensure that consistency in this area exists across all institutions both private and public. This legislation mirrors the Kansas Board of Regents policy. It will go into effect with the start of the Fall 2007 academic semester, giving non-Regents' institutions time to prepare for compliance. It should be noted that HB 2396 was developed in full collaboration with the Kansas Board of Regents, Kansas Independent College Association, Washburn University, and the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees.

Some institutions expressed a concern regarding the ability to access enough meningitis vaccine to meet the need. In conferring with several local health departments, private physicians offices, and the University of Kansas student health service, we believe that obtaining adequate supplies of meningitis vaccine is not a problem and the vaccine should be accessible to those who desire it.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. We think it will be a valuable adjunct in preserving the health of our college students. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.