

Andy Marso
Overland Park resident
Bacterial meningitis survivor

Re: Testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 213, Feb. 25, 2021

Chairman Olson and members of the Senate Commerce Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 213. My name is Andy Marso. Some of you may remember me as a statehouse reporter for various news outlets, but I'm now speaking solely as a concerned citizen who knows the value of vaccination.

I contracted a vaccine-preventable disease, bacterial meningitis, in 2004, during my senior year at KU. I was totally healthy until one day when I went to bed thinking I had the flu. By the next morning I couldn't get out of bed. I would have died in bed if my friends hadn't carried me to a car and taken me to the doctor.

Hours later I was airlifted to KU Hospital in critical condition, with multiple organs failing. I spent a month in a medically-induced coma while doctors battled the infection and saved my life.

When I regained consciousness, I realized that I couldn't move my hands and feet. The meningococcal bacteria had cut off circulation to my extremities and my fingers and toes were slowly dying while still attached to my body (see attachments).

I spent that whole summer in the hospital, enduring excruciating treatments to save my arms and legs. I also had surgeries to amputate all of my toes and all but one of my fingers.

Then I spent more than a year in rehab, doing extensive physical and occupational therapy so I could learn to walk again, shower again, feed myself and go to the bathroom on my own.

My medical bills that year ran to about \$1.5 million. All to treat a disease that can usually be prevented with a shot that costs \$150.

As with many vaccines, the meningitis shot not only protects the person who gets it, it also prevents them from transmitting the disease to others. This is important because some people in our society cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. They rely on the people around them being vaccinated to shield them from disease — a concept called herd immunity.

Senate Bill 213 has the potential to shatter herd immunity in many workplaces. Nursing homes would no longer be able to require their employees to be vaccinated, even if they routinely work with elderly people who are particularly susceptible to death from COVID-19 and other illnesses. Hospitals would no longer be able to require employees to be vaccinated, even if they routinely come into contact with patients who cannot receive vaccines, such as those who have had organ transplants or are undergoing certain cancer treatments. Day cares would no longer be able to require employees to be vaccinated, even if they routinely come into contact with children who are too young to receive vaccines themselves. (A quick reminder: the 2018 Kansas measles outbreak — the largest the state had seen in decades — initially spread mainly among unvaccinated babies in a Johnson County day care. Senate Bill 213 would almost ensure that situation is repeated again and again).

I'm not usually one for "slippery slope" arguments, but Senate Bill 213 does make me wonder what other routine public health measures the legislature might consider banning in the future, in the name of "personal choice." Will restaurants be banned from requiring that employees wear hair nets or wash their hands after using the bathroom? Will offices be banned from telling employees that they can't smoke inside? Will hospitals be banned from requiring that surgeons wear gloves and masks in the operating room?

None of these bans would be based on science, but neither is a ban on employers requiring vaccines, which are rigorously tested for safety and efficacy. No, Senate Bill 213 is based on fearmongering, and if it passes the people who will pay the harshest price are the most vulnerable among us: the young, the old, and the sick.

Attachments:



