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Heather Braum, Health Policy Advisor
Kansas Action for Children
Written-only proponent testimony for SB 404
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chairwoman Gossage and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of SB 404.

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 404 **would permit the use of expedited partner therapy (EPT) to treat sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**, including chlamydia and gonorrhea. EPT is the practice of treating the sex partners of patients diagnosed with chlamydia or gonorrhea by proactively providing prescriptions or medications to the patient to take to his or her partners without the health care provider first examining the partner.

It may seem unusual for a kids' advocacy organization to weigh in on this bill, **but STIs can cause premature labor,¹ which is the number one cause of infant death and can lead to long-term developmental and health problems in children.²** Kansas' rate of preterm births has increased from 9.0% to 10.5% of all births between 2012 and 2022.³ While not directly linking the increase of these preterm births to STIs, any intervention that can lead to a potential reduction in preterm births should be pursued.

¹ National Institutes of Health, Office of Research on Women's Health. (2019). *Sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and breastfeeding*. <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/research/maternal-morbidity-and-mortality/information-for-women/sexually-transmitted-infections>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Preterm birth*. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/PretermBirth.htm>

³ March of Dimes. (2023). *2023 March of Dimes Report Card for Kansas*. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/reports/kansas/report-card>

Also, STIs like gonorrhea and chlamydia can pass from the mother to her baby as the baby passes through the birth canal, leading to eye infections and pneumonia.⁴ Untreated gonorrhea and chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.⁵ EPT is an important public health tool to make available to healthy moms and babies.

Why is this bill needed in Kansas? EPT is already legally authorized in 46 states, but not in Kansas.⁶ Kansas has seen its STI rate significantly increase over the past two decades, nearly doubling between 2002 and 2022, from 5.5 per 1,000 residents to 9.3 per 1,000 residents (according to KDHE). Multiple studies show that using EPT leads to reductions in both chlamydia and gonorrhea prevalence. As we previously described, EPT usage could also lead to reducing the rate of STIs in pregnant women and preventing transmission to their infants during the birthing process.

By authorizing EPT, **SB 404 provides medical professionals an additional tool to proactively reduce the spread of STIs.**

Thank you for your consideration of SB 404. We ask you to favorably move this bill out of your committee and get the policy across the finish line during the 2024 legislative session.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at heather@kac.org.

⁴ Children's Minnesota. (2024). *Chlamydia in Newborns*.

<https://www.childrensmn.org/educationmaterials/childrensmn/article/15339/chlamydia-in-newborns/>

⁵ National Institutes of Health, Office of Research on Women's Health. (2019). *Sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and breastfeeding*. <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/research/maternal-morbidity-and-mortality/information-for-women/sexually-transmitted-infections>

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Legal Status of Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT)*. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/ept/legal/default.htm>