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Unified Government Public Health Department

619 Ann Avenue, Kansas City, KS 66101-3038

Phone (913) 573-8855

wycokck.org/health

Proponent Testimony – HB2407

Unified Government of Wyandotte County Public Health Department

Lindsey Hensley, *Community Health Education Program Supervisor*

Hannah Conner, *Epidemiologist*

Susan Caman, *Community Health Improvement Plan Coordinator*

House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care

February 17, 2023

Chair Concannon and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB2407, which eliminates the requirement of parental consent for participation in nonacademic school questionnaires.

Today, we are submitting written comment on behalf of the Unified Government Public Health Department (UGPHD) as public health practitioners in several areas of our Health Department operation: Lindsey Hensley, Community Health Education Program Supervisor; Hannah Conner, Epidemiologist; Susan Caman, Community Health Improvement Plan Coordinator.

The UGPHD is committed to addressing the health concerns of youth in our community through the delivery of health education and community programming. A core component of a responsive and effective public health program relies on consistent and valid sources of health data and information, specifically collected directly from the people who are most impacted.

The Community Health Education Program (CHEP) at the UGPHD provides youth with evidence-based curricula on a wide range of youth health topics from sex education to healthy relationships to conflict resolution. The goal of this program is to meet students where they are and to provide health programming that is responsive to the specific needs identified by the students themselves. Surveys help us distinguish between perceived need versus actual need. For example, if there's a bullying incident at one of our local schools, school administrators could perceive the need of additional curricula around the topic of bullying; however, through a student survey that digs into the reasons behind bullying, it could be revealed the actual need is curriculum regarding healthy coping skills and conflict resolution. Without accurate and reliable survey data, we are limited in our ability to understand students' needs and in turn, meet them where they are.

The current process of opting-in to surveys is incredibly time consuming and burdensome for schools and parents. The schools are tasked with notifying parents, receiving consent, relaying this information to the entity performing the survey, and then publishing the survey on the school website, among other steps. Not only that, but our county is one populated by parents who frequently work long hours, or sometimes two jobs, who may not have the time to sign yet another form. This leads to the delay of

information collection, and most importantly, the delay of direct health education programming for youth within the schools.

Lastly, through our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), the UGPHD uses local survey data from youth to develop measurable community health improvement goals in areas such as youth mental health and violence prevention. The current opt-in process reduces the number of students taking the survey, and in turn, reduces the reliability of the results of the data, or it may nullify the results all-together – for example, if less than 25% of the student body do not respond to the Kansas Communities that Care survey, then results for that year are not provided. Without consistent local sample sizes, we are not able to have a full picture of the community at large or set and track benchmarks for health improvement in our community.

We are in support of HB2407 because it will eliminate the barriers local health departments face with the opt-in survey process as it currently stands and allow us to fulfill our mandate to monitor and respond to the health needs of our community.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Hensley, Hannah Conner, and Susan Caman

Unified Government of Wyandotte County Public Health Department