

To whom it may concern,

We strongly oppose LB 203, which seeks to limit the authority of local health departments in responding to public health emergencies.

Consider this analogy: A flash flood washes out a bridge on a rural road. The Sheriff's Department immediately places a blockade and a "Road Closed" sign. What if, instead, the sheriff had to wait for a county "Transportation Board" meeting, which happens only every 1–2 months, before closing the road? This would be absurd and put lives at risk.

Why should public health emergencies be treated any differently?

Consider these real-world examples:

A patient with active tuberculosis (TB) is highly infectious and wants to return to work and public spaces. Without intervention, co-workers and community members risk exposure, leading to potential months of treatment for multiple individuals. A directed health measure is necessary to ensure the patient remains home until no longer contagious.

A restaurant worker contracts Hepatitis A, which spreads easily through food preparation. Many individuals lack immunity, making exposure dangerous. The worker must be excluded from work immediately until no longer infectious.

Like a washed-out bridge, these are emergencies requiring immediate action. Local health departments must have the authority to implement directed health measures as soon as a significant threat is identified—often on the same day.

Currently, Kansas City is experiencing the largest TB outbreak ever recorded in the U.S., with over 67 cases and at least two deaths. Containment requires swift public health interventions: isolating infectious individuals and ensuring proper treatment through directly observed therapy (DOT).

LB 203 would severely undermine the ability of local health departments to protect the public. We urge you to reject this bill and preserve their authority to respond to urgent health threats.

Respectfully,

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Representing Lincoln-Lancaster County Board of Health

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February 6, 2025
Senator Brian Hardin
P.O. Box 94604
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Chairman Hardin and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

Re: Legislative Bill 203

On behalf of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department the Board of Health submits this letter in opposition of LB 203.

Since the creation of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, the Health Director has had the ability to manage and respond to infectious disease threats.

These threats are not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic but also include other infectious diseases such as: Anthrax (2001), Ebola (2014), Listeria (2011), Hepatitis A (2019), H1N1 Pandemic Influenza (2008), Measles (2015), Mpox (2023), and Tularemia (2024). During these situations, health department staff were able to take quick action and control the spread of disease.

Actions (based on the unique infectious disease) might, as an example, include the closing of a restaurant to halt the spread of Hepatitis A, screening, testing and vaccinating to address monkeypox or as back in 2008, the health department held mass vaccination clinics for H1N1 Influenza.

Supporting the Health Director’s authority to take swift action to respond to an infectious disease is critical to ensuring the health and safety of our public. The Health Director makes these decisions, which may include that of a Directed Health Measure, based on any number of data sources such as hospital emergency department visits, hospital admission rates, healthcare provider visits, laboratory data, school absences, daycare absences, long-term care illness reporting, statewide data, data from contiguous counties, statewide data, data from contiguous states, etc.

In addition to identifying actions for specific infectious diseases (based on multiple data sources) the Health Director may also consult with the department’s Medical Advisor, local medical providers, businesses, elected officials (i.e., City Council, County Board, etc.), Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Epidemiologist, experts at UNMC Global Center for Health Security and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health depending on each unique infectious disease situation.

The Health Director needs the ability to respond rapidly at the local level to ensure the health and safety of the public.

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Board of Health stands in strong opposition of LB 203 and urges this committee not to advance this bill

Respectfully submitted,

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I oppose this bill.

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I oppose this bill.