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STATE OF KANSAS

**Testimony of
Kris W. Kobach
Kansas Secretary of State**

**Committee on Elections
Kansas House of Representatives**

Regarding HB 2108

January 28, 2015

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, during my tenure in office as Kansas Secretary of State, I have been guided by the principle that it should be easy to vote but hard to cheat. In 2011 the Kansas Legislature enacted the Secure and Fair Elections (SAFE) Act, which made Kansas the number one State in the country when it comes to making it hard to cheat. Today, I come before you to advocate a bill that makes it easier to vote. Specifically, I urge your favorable recommendation of HB 2108, which would allow Kansas voters the convenience of straight party ticket voting if they choose to do so.

Ballot Drop-off

It is a fact of modern life that many voters are in a hurry. Many stop at the polling place on the way to work, on the way home, or during a short lunch break. As a result, thousands of voters vote in only the top races on the ballot, but do not complete their ballot. The following statistics demonstrate this phenomenon in the November 2014 general election:

		PERCENT OF TOTAL
Total Number of Voters Casting Ballots	887,023	
Total Votes United States Senate	866,191	97.7%
United States House of Representatives	862,077	97.2%
Governor / Lt. Governor	869,502	98.0%
Secretary of State	859,618	96.9%
Attorney General	845,871	95.4%
State Treasurer	844,367	95.2%
Commissioner of Insurance	833,541	94.0%
Kansas House of Representatives	801,293	92.5%
Member State Board of Education	669,084	75.4%

HB 2108 would allow voters the option of voting a straight ticket for one party, or setting a default for one party or the other, then skipping down to the particular races in which they wish to vote for the candidate of another party. Either way, it allows the voter to complete his or her ballot in a much shorter period of time.

Kansas currently does very well in comparison to other states when it comes to lines at the polls. According to an MIT study, our average wait time was only 10 minutes in the 2012 general election, well below the national average of 13.3 minutes. One reason that voting is so fast in Kansas is that, in most counties, we combine photo ID

with electronic poll books—both reforms that I have pushed. The result is that the voter has his ID card ready; and the poll worker scans the ID card quickly rather than flipping through poll book pages. During 2011-2014, the number of counties with electronic poll books rose to 74.

If we the option of straight party ticket voting to these reforms, I am confident that our average wait time will decrease even further. Accordingly, I recommend that HB 2108 be enacted, in order to give voters an option that will increase the convenience and speed of completing a ballot in the State of Kansas.