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Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections
Testimony on SB 171
Jamie Shew, Douglas County Clerk
President, Kansas County Clerks and Election Officials Association

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition of SB 171 on behalf of the Kansas County Clerks and Election Officials Association (KCCEOA). Our organization is very appreciative of the cooperation of the Chairman in listening to our concerns and including provisions in this bill that address many of those concerns. There are concepts embodied in this bill which are helpful, including: the removal of ballot rotation, changing terms of office for precinct committee people and added flexibility in ballot design. But, there continue to be concern among our members regarding increased ballot styles, multi-page ballots, and increased complexity, especially in August even-year elections.

The August even-year primary provides challenges which were not addressed in this bill. Currently, a primary for city/school positions is dictated by the number of filings in relation to the number of open positions. For example, if a school district has three openings a primary election occurs if three times that number plus one additional candidate files for office. So, in this case, the number which would force a primary is 10 candidates filed for the same office. In the primary, voters are allowed to vote for unto three candidates and the top six vote getters move to the General Election. If the candidates are filing under party labels, how do we designate what causes a primary and how many from each party ballot move to the general? The only solution would be to make each position a separate race on the ballot, which in turn adds to the length and complexity of the ballots. These complexities still need to be addressed within this legislation. During the interim committee hearing, many of our members completed spreadsheets which broke down the cost per voter. For every county polled, the August Primary Election is our most costly to operate per voter. Adding these additional challenges further increases those costs.

Our organization recognizes this bill was the initial starting point for an important conversation about elections in Kansas and commends the committee for offering these ideas for consideration. Our opposition to parts of this bill does not negate our support for other portions of the bill or for further ideas to increase turnout in local elections. Our organization strongly supports pursuing expansion of mail ballot elections in Kansas; testimony during the interim committee supported the fact that this concept was the most successful in increasing turnout in local elections. Because of the forward thinking of the Kansas Legislature and willingness to try new ideas in elections, counties recently conducted LOB mail ballot elections which resulted in turnouts much larger than would have occurred under the traditional polling place model.

Thank you for your consideration. Our association respectfully requests that you not support SB 171 in its current format. We look forward to working with you on alternatives. I am available to stand for questions at the appropriate time.