

TO: House Committee on Elections
RE: SB 208 – Written Testimony
FR: Connie Brown Collins
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County
DT: March 6, 2023

Dear Chairman Proctor and Committee Members:

My name is Connie Brown Collins, Founder/Director of Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County. I live in Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas. Our organization hosts regular meetings on voting rights and other pertinent issues with a number of participating organizations and committed individuals, both from Wyandotte and Johnson Counties.

I am writing to strongly oppose SB 208 that would prohibit all remote advanced ballot boxes. I further oppose any bill's restrictions that undermine the ability of Kansans to vote safely, fairly and with adequate accessibility. The opposed restrictions include:

- Ballot boxes can only be located inside the county election office;
- Ballot boxes can only be located at a satellite advance voting site.

These ballot boxes are only available when election office or satellite advance voting sites are open, often eliminating evening and weekend use. They are not available to a large number of voters who need more flexible access.

In Wyandotte County, the election office ballot box is only available until 7:00 p.m. Election Day, not the weekend prior. The satellite advance voting sites are not open at all on Election Day.

Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab has repeatedly said that advanced voting in Kansas is safe, secure, and has been popularly used by Kansans for decades. 41% of Kansans voted by advanced ballot in the 2022 election, and 1 in 3 Kansans voted by mail in 2020. Restricting advanced voting could seriously impede citizens' ability to vote.

There is strong bipartisan support for keeping advanced ballot drop boxes numerous and accessible. Secretary of State Schwab has repeatedly supported the use of advanced ballot drop boxes as a secure means of returning a ballot. If our goal is to increase opportunities for Kansans to be active voting members of society, unfortunately this bill could seriously dilute the voter turnout we are seeking to improve. Local election officials have opposed these types of restrictions when they came up in the last two sessions.

This bill has the potential to severely diminish advanced voting for people with disabilities, elderly, rural communities, shift employees and others who need the flexibility, including myself, who depend on the sense of independence, accomplishment

and fulfillment inherent in the democratic voting process that the advance ballot boxes provide.

Based on my personal knowledge and experience, my neighbor and friend is physically disabled. She does drive, but only for short distances. On her brief solo excursions, she stays in her car. She will only leave the driver's seat to vote if someone has accompanied and escorted her inside, with either her walker or wheelchair. If no caregiver or friend is available, her only options are mail-in ballot or remote ballot drop box. As we all know, a mail-in ballot has its risks.

The closest remote drop box to our neighborhood and within her sphere of travel has been the Kansas City Kansas West Branch Library. If the drop box location is moved to the Election Office or to the satellite advance voting site, with availability only during their scheduled hours, she has no other independent option.

To ensure that my neighbor and others who share her limitations and reduced flexibility have the opportunity and adequate accommodations to cast their ballots, please oppose SB 208. If any alterations to advance ballot boxes are made, they should progress toward providing more ballot boxes, not fewer, allowing greater, not less access and opportunity for Kansas voters to cast their ballots.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,
Connie Brown Collins

Connie Brown Collins
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County