

February 6, 2024

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to Senate Bill 365 - requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7pm on election day.

Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 365. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. We oppose this legislation as it will negatively impact people's livelihoods and wellbeing. Voting rights are an important social driver of health, as determined by the American Medical Association, and this bill requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7pm on election day, cuts directly against that. According to the Health and Democracy Index, the more inclusive and expansive voting access is, the better the health outcomes are for a state.

Barriers to voting access should be reduced not amplified. According to official data from the Kansas Secretary of State, despite record high turnout, over 29% of eligible voters chose not to exercise their power to vote in 2020. This legislation would make it harder for people to vote in advance by mail and would invalidate Constitutionally protected votes. In the same election, nearly 460,000 Kansans sent in advance ballots by mail. Advance mail in balloting should be protected, as it is the second most utilized means of casting a ballot in Kansas in the 2020 election, according to the Kansas Secretary of State.

SB 365 creates unnecessary barriers that will most assuredly lead to hard-working people in rural communities in Kansas not having their votes counted because of distance to travel to drop off a ballot. It would harm those with obligations to childcare, care for a sick or elderly adult, or work by giving them less options to vote as their schedule demands. Additionally, this type of harmful legislation would affect Kansans of color most adversely, according to a Brennan Center for Justice study.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote no on SB 365. We would instead encourage the legislature to support ways to increase voter turnout and civic engagement in Kansas to empower citizens to participate more freely in the democratic process. Please feel free to contact me at nmadden@healthforward.org

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D.
Health Forward Foundation

**OUR
PURPOSE**

Every day we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.