

Johnson County Election Office



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Election Commissioner

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS AND ELECTIONS RE: HB 2437

Thursday, March 15, 2012

Members of the Committee:

Just as I did before the House Elections Committee in February, I come to you today to speak, from an election administrator's perspective, in support of HB 2437.

When waiting to testify on the bill last month, I heard many discussions about the provisions in the Secure and Fair Elections Act, the SAFE Act, passed by the legislature and signed by the governor into law last year. Many of the discussions focused on the SAFE Act itself, rather than the simple change in implementation dates, which is the sole issue this bill addresses.

I think that's an important item to mention because this bill simply moves up the deadline from January 2013 to June 2012. The merit of the timing of specific move is all that's really on the table.

Our office supported the January 1, 2012, effective date in recognition of the economies of scale that could be leveraged when communicating the law's changes to voters. Passage of all provisions at once provided the cleanest method of communicating to voters:

"Proof of citizenship when registering, proof of ID when voting," is a simple message.

Toss in the element of time, when some aspects go into effect while others won't for a while, and the message becomes complicated. That may sound subtle, but every added word when explaining the changes invites a new fork in the road for confusion.

Voters have heard of the SAFE Act. They've heard of citizenship verification and voter ID. Many remember how first-time voters were required to show ID.

They deserve a crystal-clear message of the changes ahead. That message is most clear without any time element: "Proof of citizenship when registering, proof of ID when voting."

That's what it will be in January. Why leave it more complicated than that when voters are gearing up for the presidential election?

Now, I understand that it's not reasonable to think that you would construct the law so that it's first and foremost easy to administer in Johnson County, but the administration should be a factor. That was my point last year and it remains my point now.

We have a built-in outreach method right now because voters are coming to us. They call us. They come to our website. They come to our outreach meetings. They do this because of the heightened interest in a presidential election year.

This is our chance to create a simple message rather than complicate the message with staggered implementation dates. When they come to our site, all they care about is 2012. We could animate in bold coloring the information about 2013, but human nature will be to tune it out and focus on the immediate. And, if we try to squeeze in some 2013 talk through Twitter and other communications, we risk confusion during the 2012 election cycle.

So, it's my belief that delaying citizenship verification created a short fuse for communication to voters. When the November 2012 election ends, election activity doesn't end. We'll have a primary in February 2013 and a countywide general election in April. The primary is not small, averaging 140,000 voters over the last three primaries.

In fact, we have about the same time to prepare for the February election, after November, that we do to prepare for the November election after this August. Then, we have another election five weeks later.

So, beyond the wisdom of implementing this while voters are most attuned to the process, when education would be the easiest, moving the implementation from January 1, 2013, protects the election process in the spring by not tossing these new requirements in the middle of an election cycle.

For us, the cycle is August through April. We'd like the provisions to go into effect before the cycle, not in the middle of the cycle.

We don't have an outreach budget and we rely on the vehicles we have in place. Our website will be visited more than any other county website in 2012. We have a throng of voters coming to us.

This is our chance—in 2012—to communicate all of the changes simply, directly, and at once.

I believe having this provision effective as we prepare for the August election and beyond, as was initially anticipated, is the best way to ensure success of implementation, and I respectfully ask the Committee to advance this bill to the full Senate.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments.