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STATE OF KANSAS
House Committee on Elections

Testimony on House Bill 2271

Secretary of State Kris W. Kobach

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 2271. This bill deals with local and municipal elections currently held in the spring of odd-numbered years. The bill would:

- change local elections from nonpartisan to partisan
- move these elections from the spring of odd-numbered years to the fall of even-numbered years to coincide with national, state and county elections
- provide for a simpler ballot rotation scheme for most jurisdictions
- make all elections for local school boards and community college boards of trustees at-large

This bill affects the following jurisdictions: extension districts, cities, boards of public utilities, water districts, drainage districts, irrigation districts, unified school districts, and community colleges.

From a public policy perspective, we support legislation that will increase turnout. This bill will undoubtedly increase turnout in local elections. From an election administration standpoint, we insist on an election process that can be successfully administered by our county election officers. We must reduce complexity, minimize costs, avoid voter confusion, take steps to prevent long lines at polling places, and minimize the possibility of ballot distribution errors by poll workers. Three components of House Bill 2271 are designed to do that—(1) making all elections partisan, (2) simplifying ballot rotation, and (3) requiring certain elections to be conducted at large rather than by member districts.

We have distributed a handout that gives an idea of the complexity that may result in one county if appropriate steps are not taken. A series of overlays indicates the divisions Butler County would see if local elections are simply added to the ballot that currently exists for even-year elections. Because most local jurisdictions do not follow precinct lines, many additional ballot variations are created, which leads to ballot printing and machine programming costs that are paid by the counties. This complexity can lead to voter confusion, longer lines at polling places, and errors in ballot distribution.

That is why my support for 2271 is conditional. We should combine all elections in the fall of even numbered years if and only if the three steps enumerated above are also taken to reduce the number of ballot variations in any given county.

We have listed below some sections of the bill that we believe should be amended. We urge the committee to amend House Bill 2271 as proposed and to report the bill, as amended, favorably for passage.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Proposed Amendments to House Bill 2271

- a. Section 17, Page 16, line 33—Insert “of November” after “Monday”
- b. Section 28, Page 27, Line 23—Delete “following the first Monday in”
- c. Section 31, Page 28, Lines 19-22—Delete Section 31 of the bill because it creates a different ballot rotation scheme for school districts than is specified for other jurisdictions.
- d. Section 33, Page 29, Line 8—Delete “25-209” and insert “25-25-105”
- e. Section 35, Page 31, Lines 11-19—Restore the language beginning with “if there are more than” on line 11 through “in the general election” on line 19. This will keep in place the current rule for determining when a primary is need in local school districts, and it will maintain consistency between school districts, cities and community colleges.
- f. Section 46, Page 36, Lines 29-33—Delete Section 46 of the bill because it creates a different ballot rotation scheme for cities than is specified for other jurisdictions.
- g. Section 59, Page 48, Lines 3-11— Restore the language beginning with “if there are more than” on line 11 through “in the general election” on line 19. This will keep in place the current rule for determining when a primary is need in local school districts, and it will maintain consistency between school districts, cities and community colleges.
- h. Section 60, Page 48, Lines 31-36—Delete Section 60 of the bill because it creates a different ballot rotation scheme for community colleges than is specified for other jurisdictions.