



March 9, 2015

House Committee on Elections

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Dear Honorable Members of the House Committee on Elections:

I am submitting testimony as Chairman of the Johnson and Wyandotte Counties Council of Mayors, representing over 727,000 Kansans (25% of the State's population), to voice our opposition to Sub SB171 that would alter the existing election process for cities in Kansas. I believe the current cycle better serves the people of Kansas for the following reasons:

- 1) The cost of "getting your message out" is much less in April and many of these local (April cycle) elected jobs receive no compensation to help offset the cost. Competing with other high profile campaigns would reduce contributions to fund local campaigns. This is particularly important in small municipalities across the state and could work to restrict the pool of candidates to those wealthy enough to fund a campaign themselves.
- 2) While those I represent would prefer that local elections be held in April, if that is not an option I am in favor of the amendment adopted in the Senate that would move municipal elections to the fall in odd years. Moving municipal elections to even years in the fall would cause them to essentially fall to the bottom of the ballot (regardless of a proposal to literally put them at the top) and have low priority for voters and media attention. Voters likely will not take the time to research municipal issues or candidates when so many other races are competing for their time and attention. This could lead to those voters not casting a vote for municipal candidates.

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- 3) It is unlikely that combining the cycles would result in more votes being cast for many of the reasons stated in number two above and because the longer ballots could actually result in voters failing to vote in the municipal election – effectively resulting in a lower voter turnout for municipal election issues. If the primary concern being addressed by this bill is improving voter turnout, I respectfully submit that August primaries do not help, but enabling increased usage of mail-in ballots would help!
- 4) I do applaud the amendment made in the Senate to Sub SB171 that keeps these elections non-partisan, as local political issues are not partisan by nature. Decisions about whether or when to invest in infrastructure, business or residential development, more efficient or effective governance, etc., do not generally follow regional or national political platforms.
- 5) The federal Hatch Act and Defense Department directives would prohibit active duty military and federal employees from running for partisan offices resulting in a smaller candidate pool in many areas of the State. I myself am a navy veteran and, were I still on active duty, I would be unable to run for office if the elections were made partisan.
- 6) New evidence from the Secretary of State has refuted the theory that this move will save money for the State and County election budgets for a variety of reasons.
- 7) The bill prohibits cities and other local governments from holding bond or sales tax question elections on any date other than an August or November election. This restriction will have a negative impact upon cities and counties because it significantly impedes the flexibility and timing on city projects, municipal finances, and other actions that require local referendum to implement.
- 8) The proposed bill would require 3,812 elected City officials to serve longer terms than for which they were elected. Such a move encroaches upon the democratic decisions made by Kansas communities and creates unanswered constitutional questions regarding the lengthened terms that would be necessary for the transition.

It is imperative that we maintain the non-partisan municipal elections separate from the higher profile partisan elections. If you have questions or would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you.

Sincerely,



Richard T. Boeshaar
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Council of Mayors
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