



February 9, 2015

Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Senators:

You may find my experience first as a volunteer city council member and then as mayor of the City of Derby to be of some use as you consider SB171 to move city and school elections to partisan elections in the fall.

Your concern for increasing voter turnout could be addressed in more productive and less controversial ways. In other states, mailing ballots has yielded higher turnout. Another idea would be for county election commissioners or the Secretary of State's office to promote the value of local elections in our representative democracy.

Last year when this issue arose during the legislative session, I recall at least one county election commissioner expressing concern with shifting her office's workload to one season thus creating a need for more staff and/or increasing the risk of errors. This is only logical, and I have not heard a solution proposed, so I caution you to get a clear fiscal note before passing this bill lest it become yet another unfunded mandate on counties and another opportunity for mistakes made during the administration of elections.

Most of the time in many of the 600+ cities in Kansas, few people want to serve in these mostly thankless, unpaid positions. City councils make decisions about providing police and fire protection, sanitary sewer, and clean water--basic but important decisions for quality of life, and not exactly the stuff addressed in party platforms.

Low voter turnout often is the result of few people running, yielding little if any competition and thus citizens not feeling the need to go to the polls. Generally, I have found that if people believe their community is doing well and is on the right track, they entrust local decisions to those who have volunteered; otherwise, they run against them and debate the issues of concern locally, not the philosophical issues addressed in state and federal campaigns.

Please, do not vote in favor of sweeping changes affecting all of our cities until logistical and cost issues are clear. Your consideration of this perspective is most appreciated.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Dion P. Avello'.

Dion P. Avello
Mayor

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