



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS AND  
ELECTIONS REGARDING SENATE BILL 171  
FEBRUARY 11, 2015  
ROY CESSNA, MAYOR  
CITY OF GARDEN CITY, KANSAS**

**CITY COMMISSION**

ROY CESSNA,  
Mayor

MELVIN L. DALE

JANET A. DOLL

DAN FANKHAUSER

J. CHRISTOPHER LAW

MATTHEW C. ALLEN  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing my written testimony regarding Senate Bill 171. The City of Garden City opposes this bill based on its erosion of home rule, interference in local elections, and its potential impact on the quality of city government.

This bill would make all city elections partisan and place those races on the same ballot as state and federal elections in November of even years. Cities are not extensions of State or Federal government. They are municipal corporations best run without the infusion of party politics. The City of Garden City feels that inserting partisanship into local governing bodies is both unnecessary and unwise.

Although combining elections may engage a larger portion of the population in local races, it would come at the direct expense of awareness of local issues. Currently, local elections are the only elections happening in the spring affording local issues media coverage. Bundling elections would make city races an afterthought to the party politics that attract the vast majority of media attention and campaign donations.

Furthermore, odd-year elections are often used as a vehicle to decide sales tax issues, bond issues, and other issues that require an election by a public vote, in order to avoid paying for an additional special election. Eliminating that opportunity will create an increase in special elections, making it difficult for cities and counties to budget for election costs.

Moving local elections also creates transitional issues and disrupts the budget cycle. If Senate Bill 171 is passed, officials currently holding office would either be removed from office before their terms expire, or will have their terms extended. Garden City residents voted for their local officials to serve a certain amount of time. It is not appropriate for the state legislature to override the will of local residents. The bill disrupts the budget cycle by making terms for elected officials begin in January, rather than April. The current system allows city officials to take office and then begin working toward budgeting for community services. The proposed legislation would create a lag time between the community choosing its representatives and when those representatives could begin carrying out the will of the citizens.



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The City of Garden City asks you to oppose SB171. Protecting home rule and preserving as much local determination in the governance of municipal corporations is a cornerstone of the City's legislative policy. While every person and parcel of property in Kansas resides in a County and is part of a school system, such is not the case for choosing to live or having your property incorporated into a City. Garden Citians (and we believe Kansans, too) much prefer to determine their own fate. The City's legislative policy reflects that sentiment, and we routinely oppose any attempt by the State government to intervene in the operations of local government. Homogenizing the selection of local municipal governance structures strikes at the core of what we believe and what we understand creators of our form of government believed to be central to its success.

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