

TESTIMONY

SB 171

An Act concerning elections and voting; relating to certain municipalities and special districts.

**Whitney Damron
On behalf of the City of Topeka**

**Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections
February 11, 2015**

Chairman Holmes and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the City of Topeka, we would respectfully oppose SB 171 and ask this Committee not to make changes to municipal elections.

The City of Topeka's 2015 Legislative Agenda includes this position statement:

Support for city elections to remain non-partisan and separate from state and national elections, and for cities to continue to determine when elections are held.

City elections in Kansas by and large are non-partisan and held at a time when they are not apt to be lost in the traffic of fall election advertisements and campaigns. They typically are low-budget campaigns as local candidates simply cannot and do not attract the kinds of contributions, PAC money and related support seen in fall elections. In years with national elections, including a presidential campaign, high profile U.S. Senate and congressional races and a governor's race, local candidates will literally be unable to get their message out to the public through paid advertising due to costs and lack of available media time.

Some might suggest moving spring odd-numbered year municipal elections to the fall would not unduly alter the makeup of the municipal election process if kept separate from even-numbered elections. The City of Topeka believes such logic is a solution in search of a problem.

Cities can already move elections to the fall or any other time through Home Rule Authority. If the local citizenry wanted to make changes, they could request their elected officials to do so. We have seen political interests desirous of moving municipal elections to the fall, but we have not seen any significant public interest in doing so. With more than 600 cities in the State of Kansas and hundreds of other political subdivisions currently holding spring elections in odd-numbered years, it is logical that if local officials thought moving elections would be an improvement in the election process, at least one would have come forth to either move their elections through home rule authority or seek legislative permission for a move.

Moving elections from the spring to the fall in even-numbered years and making them partisan is an unnecessary politicization of municipal elections and not something being asked for by the voters. If the agenda is improving voter turnout, there are less onerous options available for consideration, including mail-in ballots. The City of Topeka suggests local elections be left to locally-elected officials to determine when best to be held.

In closing, we would reiterate the City of Topeka's opposition to making changes to municipal elections and ask the Committee to reject SB 171.

Thank you.

Whitney Damron
On behalf of the City of Topeka
919 S. Kansas Ave., Topeka, KS 66612
(785) 354-1354 - wbdamron@gmail.com