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Testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 171
To
The Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections
February 11, 2015

Chairman Holmes and members of the committee:

I am here to express concerns with the proposals for changes that Senate Bill 171 makes to move the dates of local elections and to make those elections partisan.

In many conversations about this proposal in my district, I have heard no positive remarks and a number and variety of objections. Changing the dates and the time when the terms of office would begin to create situations where we have “lame duck” officials as well as terms of office that begin months before deliberation of future budgets. We would also be lengthening the time that candidates, many of whom are running for unpaid positions, have to spend campaigning. There are fears that partisanship would discourage individuals not only from running for office but also from participating in local meetings – in contrast to desires that we encourage members in our communities to work together. I know of nothing in either the Democratic or Republican Party Platforms that speaks to barking dogs, backed-up sewers, or school bus schedules. Proposed solutions to non-partisan issues should not be lost in a flurry of partisan campaigning.

Some years ago I was elected to a four-year term on the Lawrence City Commission and served for two of those years as Mayor. I came to appreciate the plan that elects three members, all at large, to that five-member body every two years. The top two vote-getters serve four-year terms and the third vote-getter serves a two-year term so every two years the public has an opportunity to “throw the rascals out” yet some continuity is maintained. It makes sense that the candidate elected with the fewest number of votes serves a shorter term. I can’t figure out changes that would accommodate a partisan election (special seats? districts?) but not do away with the advantages of our current system. Those changes are needed along with a way to address terms of office that go beyond 2016.

I urge you to not pass out this bill that only creates problems for our local levels of government.

marci francisco