

REVISED
SESSION OF 2015

**SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE ON SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE
BILL NO. 171**

As Recommended by Senate Committee on
Elections

Brief*

Sub. for SB 171 would move all elections for office holders of local governments specified below currently held in the spring to the fall of odd-numbered years, with one exception (described below). The elections would remain nonpartisan. Sections to be added to law, Sections 1 through 7, would be cited as the Help Kansas Vote Act.

Beginning in 2017, the election dates for the specified units of local government would mirror the election dates for the elections held in even-numbered years. That is, the primary election would be held on the first Tuesday in August, and the general election would be held on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November. The elections, to be administered by the county election officers, would be consolidated into one ballot, which would be prescribed by the Secretary of State through rules and regulations. Those entities currently with district method elective offices (*i.e.*, cities and school districts) would retain that authority.

Local units of government affected are included in the definition of municipalities as the following (Section 1):

*Supplemental notes are prepared by the Legislative Research Department and do not express legislative intent. The supplemental note and fiscal note for this bill may be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.kslegislature.org>

- Cities;
- The consolidated city-county governments of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, and Greeley County;
- School districts;
- The Kansas City Board of Public Utilities;
- Community colleges;
- Drainage districts;
- Extension districts formed pursuant to KSA 2-623 *et seq.*;
- Irrigation districts;
- Improvement districts formed pursuant to KSA 19-2753 *et seq.*;
- Water districts formed pursuant to KSA 19-3501 *et seq.* (Water One); and
- Hospital districts formed pursuant to KSA 2014 Supp. 80-2501 *et seq.*

Not included is any special district where governing body member elections are conducted at a meeting of the special district(Section 1.)

Cities

Provisions specific to cities are described below:

- The one exception to elections being in odd-numbered years would be the option the bill would provide cities to also have elections in even-numbered years, for the purpose of staggering

terms or having three-year terms of office (Section 1);

- The bill also would make changes to numerous statutes, the purpose of which are to make city election law uniform so as to not differ by class of city. (Numerous sections contain stricken language for this purpose; additionally, Section 61 repeals 56 statutes that are not replaced – all of Chapter 12, Article 10);
- A new section would clarify any city could adopt, by ordinance, any one of the following forms of government: commission, mayor-council, commission-manager, mayor-council-manager, council-manager, or any other form authorized by law or by city ordinance or charter ordinance (Section 3);
- The bill would deem all existing ordinances and charter ordinances, except those relating to the timing of primary and general elections, to remain in effect until amended or repealed by the city (Section 2);
- A city governing body would be required to establish by ordinance the number of qualified electors who must sign a nomination petition. (Section 43); and
- The bill would allow a city governing body to determine whether that city's elections will be non-partisan or partisan (Section 44.)

Provision Specific to School Districts

The bill would require all unified school districts to make available, upon request of the county election officer, suitable school buildings for polling places. The county election officer

would be required to give at least 90 days' notice to the school district superintendent (Section 4.)

Voter Education, Official Municipal Ballot, Declaration of Intent, Ballot Rotation, Ballot Length

Voter education. The Secretary of State would be required to develop a public information program to inform the public of the changes related to moving elections from spring to fall. This information must contain at least an explanation of which offices' elections are involved. The information program must use advertisements and public service announcements, in addition to posting information on the official websites of the Secretary of State and county election officers. Finally, the bill would require the Secretary of State and county election officers to develop dedicated websites to provide voter education and sample ballots. County election officers, in consultation with the Secretary of State, would be required to develop ways to reduce ballot length and expedite the voting process on election days (Section 5.)

Official ballot, declaration of intent, and primary election procedures. The bill would require the Secretary of State to prescribe the official ballot for municipal office and the declaration of intent to become a candidate. Candidates would be required to file the declarations with the county election officer no later than noon, June 1, in odd-numbered years, with an exception provided if that date falls on a weekend or a holiday. For entities where a primary election is not authorized or otherwise required, the declaration of intent would have to be filed no later than noon on September 1, with a similar exception provided.

The Secretary of State would be required to establish primary election procedures for the municipalities covered under the bill. The bill would require these responsibilities of the Secretary of State be implemented *via* rules and regulations (Section 6.)

Other Changes

The bill would delete or replace several provisions in existing law to comport with the bill's intent of consolidating all spring elections for officials to the fall of odd-numbered years. This includes changes in primary and general election filing deadlines and procedures, terms of office, ballot creation and canvassing, periods of time when school and community college districts could change their method of election, and notices of elections.

The bill would increase each voter's time limit in the voting booth from five minutes to ten minutes, when other voters are waiting (Section 50.)

The bill would increase candidate filing fees from \$5 to \$20 and would specify a \$20 filing fee for any municipal office included in the bill (Sections 1, 15, 36, 57, 60.)

The bill would require the county election officer to notify each person on the permanent advance voting list who has failed to vote in four (increased from two) general elections that the person must renew the application for permanent advance voting status or be removed from the permanent advance voting list; the general elections would include those held in odd-numbered years (Section 29.)

The bill would increase from 1 to 2 the number of 16- or 17-year-olds who would be allowed to serve on each election board. It also would require each 16- or 17-year old so appointed to have a letter of recommendation from a school teacher, counselor, or administrator (Section 49.)

The bill would lengthen the term of a precinct committeeman or precinct committeewoman from two years to four years. They would be elected during presidential election years (Section 52.)

More detailed information about changes to law is available on the KLRD website.

Background

Article 4, Section 2 of the *Kansas Constitution* states, “General elections shall be held biennially on the Tuesday succeeding the first Monday in November in even-numbered years. Not less than three county commissioners shall be elected in each organized county in the state, as provided by law.” No further constitutional direction is given regarding specific types of elections or timing.

Kansas statutes require federal, state, and county elections be held in the fall of even-numbered years. Elections for officials of cities, school districts, and all additional political subdivisions holding elections to be voted on by the electorate are held in the spring of odd-numbered years. Special elections may be held at other times.

The first bill proposing moving spring elections to the fall was introduced in the 2010 Legislative Session. At least ten bills have been introduced on or amended to include the topic, with seven of those offered in the 2013-2014 biennium. At the end of the 2014 Legislative Session, a study was requested on the topic and assigned to the Special Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government. The Special Committee heard directly from three other states’ experts on the challenges and benefits of combining elections, either completely or partially, in those states. The Committee also received a presentation from a staff representative of the National Conference of State Legislatures, regarding the history and current practice of election scheduling in the nation, and from Kansas election officials.

The Special Committee also heard from the author of purportedly the only scholarly book published on the subject, *Timing and Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*. The author’s work concluded off-cycle election timing enhances the effectiveness of organized groups’ mobilization efforts.

Following this review and Committee discussion, no recommendations were made. However, the Special Committee Chairperson indicated a bill would be presented and considered during the 2015 Session. SB 171, as introduced, was that bill.

The bill was introduced by the Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections.

Proponents who testified to the Senate Committee were city commissioners from Larned and Pratt, a former school board member from Winfield, a Wichita school board member, and a former member of the State Board of Education, each testifying as an individual. The Executive Director of the Kansas Republican Party testified on behalf of the party.

Written testimony in support of the bill was received from a representative of Kansans for Liberty and a past city council candidate.

Testimony in support of the bill focused primarily on increasing voter turnout. Increasing the pool of candidates was another reason mentioned, as was the short time between a fall election and a subsequent spring election, the higher probability of poor spring weather, and the opportunity for school board members to have additional time in office prior to voting on the school district budget.

Neutral testimony on behalf of the Secretary of State was provided by the Assistant State Election Director.

Opponents who testified before the Senate Committee were Senator Francisco; a school board member from Rush County; the superintendent of USD 208 (Trego County); a city commissioner from Wichita; the Douglas County Clerk, as president of the Kansas County Clerks and Election Officials Association; and representatives of the League of Kansas Municipalities and the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB.)

Written testimony in opposition to at least one aspect of the bill was received from individuals and organizations in the categories listed below:

- Cities: representatives of the cities of Colby, Edwardsville, Garden City, Hutchinson, Lawrence, Lecompton, Lenexa, Manhattan, Marysville, Neodesha, Ottawa, Overland Park, Paola, Prairie Village, Salina, Shawnee, Topeka, and Wakefield; the president of the Kansas Mayors Association; and city council members from Maize and Overbrook;
- Counties: representatives of Coffey and Johnson counties and the Kansas Association of Counties, the Crawford County Clerk and Election Officer, and the Norton County Clerk and Election Officer;
- School boards: representatives of USD 220 (Blue Valley), USD 233 (Olathe), USD 475 (Geary County), the Shawnee Mission Board of Education, the Board of Wichita Public Schools, Game on for Kansas Schools, Kansas PTA, and the KASB, and school board members from USD 108 (Washington County), USD 204 (Bonner Springs), USD 214 (Ulysses), USD 226 (Meade), USD 233 (Olathe), USD 327 (Ellsworth), USD 383 (Manhattan-Ogden), USD 446 (Independence), USD 458 (Basehor-Linwood), and USD 509 (South Haven);
- Community colleges: the Executive Director of the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees; and
- Other organizations: representatives of the Kansas City, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce, the Mainstream Coalition and Education Foundation, and Sunflower Community.

Reasons that were most cited by opponents were a desire to keep local elections non-partisan, a concern the bill erodes home rule, a concern partisan elections would mean military and federal workers could not run for office, a concern combined elections would reduce interest in local issues, and concerns the changes in term dates would adversely impact the local government.

The Senate Committee amended the bill to do the following:

- Move elections for cities and school districts from the fall of even-numbered years to the fall of odd-numbered years and return them to being nonpartisan elections;
- Remove the category of “special districts” and include all within the definition of “municipality”;
- Delete the mandate for a school district to provide an in-service (professional development) day on an election day when the county election officer has called for use of a school building as a polling place and increase the minimum notice from 60 days to 90 days;
- Clarify the city manager, as well as any other, a form of government which would be allowed under the bill;
- Change the ballot rotation procedure to delete the randomized alphabetical rotation method and instead reflect current requirements for the municipalities affected;
- Return ballot rotation procedures to those in current law for national and state offices; and

- Increase each voter's time limit in the voting booth from five minutes to ten minutes, when other voters are waiting.

The substitute bill reflects those amendments.

At the time the bill was recommended by the Senate Committee, no fiscal note prepared by the Division of the Budget was available.