

## **Testimony in support of Senate Bill 8 Senate Democratic Leader Anthony Hensley**

Chairman Esau and members of the Committee:

I appear before you to express my support for Senate Bill 8.

My testimony today is primarily to stress the importance of this bill for citizens of Shawnee County and other counties where advance ballots are sent to a U.S. Postal Service (USPS) processing center outside of their county or outside of our state and then returned to them in the mail a few days later.

In 2012, the USPS announced it was moving the processing of Topeka-area mail from North Topeka to Kansas City, Missouri. The USPS acknowledged that the move could cause delays in mail delivery, and indeed that has happened. To the extent those delays could impact the delivery of advance voting ballots, the law needs to be changed as provided by Senate Bill 8.

Not only was Topeka mail service impacted, mail processing for the cities of Hays, Salina, Dodge City and Hutchinson was moved to Wichita; mail processing for Liberal was moved to Abilene, Texas; and mail processing for Colby was moved to North Platte, Nebraska.

In Shawnee County alone, 94 ballots that were postmarked by November 8, 2016, were not counted for the general election. The change in law proposed by this bill will ensure that fewer voters are disenfranchised due to delay in mail delivery.

Seven other states already have laws in place providing for advance ballots postmarked on or before election day to be counted after election day. Most of those states allow receipt up to the canvass date. I believe Senate Bill 8 provides a balance between protecting voting rights while giving the county election office adequate time to process these ballots.

Further, I suspect most Kansans already believe that if they mail their ballot by election day it will be counted. They certainly would not be able to guess how many days of delay could be caused by USPS processing of what they consider a "local" delivery. Finally, Kansans mailing ballots from other states would benefit from this bill as well. According to local USPS officials, it takes three to five days to get mail across country.

Because of these mail delays, it is important to move the last date to request advance ballots back as well. SB 8 sets that date at one week before the election. That change should ensure that voters receive their advance ballots at home prior to election day.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 8.