



SUPPORT FOR HB 2512 – Allowing Sedgwick County voters to vote at any polling place in the county
Written Testimony of Nadine F. Johnson
Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas
ELECTIONS COMMITTEE – February 4, 2020

Chairman Sutton and Members of this Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this issue. The ACLU of Kansas is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that works to preserve and strengthen the constitutional liberties of every person in this state. The ACLU of Kansas supports HB 2512 as a positive step toward improving citizen participation in elections.

We encourage this body to take every step to expand access to the polls for eligible Kansas voters. There is room for improvement: In the 2016 presidential general election, Kansas’s voter turnout was 34th in the country at just 59.2% —markedly below the nearly 75% rate in states with the highest turnout.¹ In the 2018 midterm general election, Kansas’s turnout rate was in the bottom half of the country, at slightly over 50%. Kansas ranks 40th in the country for the percentage of eligible voters who are actually registered.² Correspondingly, a recent research report found that Kansas was the ninth most difficult state in which to cast a ballot.³

Granting Sedgwick County officials the option to open voting access across the county would provide data points for statewide implementation of this practice, pursuant to related legislation. Sedgwick County Election Commissioner Tabitha Lehman has testified that her office has “the technology and the expertise” to allow voters the opportunity to vote at any polling place within the county.⁴

Further, allowing this request to move forward will encourage additional citizen participation in our elections. Allowing voters to vote at any place in the county will ameliorate some of the unnecessary barriers that people face in accessing the polls, make voting more convenient.

The more that citizens participate in a democracy, the stronger that democracy becomes. The ACLU of Kansas urges this Committee to pass HB 2512 as a means of promoting citizen participation in our elections and to set an example for broader implementation of this practice. Thank you.

¹ Michael P. McDonald, United States Election Project. www.electproject.org.

² MIT Election & Data Science Lab. (2016). Elections Performance Index. Retrieved November 6, 2018, from <https://elections.mit.edu/#state-KS>

³ Quan Li, Michael J. PomanteII, and Scot Schraufnagel. “Cost of Voting in the American States.” Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy. Sep 2018.

⁴ http://www.kslegislature.org/li/b2019_20/committees/ctte_s_ethics_elections_and_local_government_1/documents/testimony/20190222_02.pdf