



EQUALITY ♦ LAW ♦ JUSTICE

Disability Rights Center of Kansas

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Opponent for HB 2555 House Elections Committee February 9, 2022

Chairman Bergquist and members of the committee:

My name is Mike Burgess. I am the Director of Policy & Outreach at the Disability Rights Center of Kansas (DRC). DRC is a public interest legal advocacy organization that is part of a national network of federally mandated organizations empowered to advocate for Kansans with disabilities. DRC is the officially designated protection and advocacy system in Kansas. DRC is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, organizationally independent of state government and whose sole interest is the protection of the legal rights of Kansans with disabilities.

The Disability Rights Center of Kansas opposes any policy changes that will make it more difficult for Kansans with disabilities to vote and have their vote counted. Unfortunately the changes in HB2555 will make it more likely that Kansans with disabilities will be removed from the voting rolls.

While we absolutely encourage Kansans with disabilities to exercise their right to vote, there are a number of very valid reasons why a person with a disability might miss voting in two consecutive federal elections and then fail to respond to a postcard mailed by their county election office. Under HB2555, that would lead to them being removed from the voter rolls.

One example would be an individual in an accident who temporarily is receiving care in a hospital or other facility that is not their residence during the August to November timeframe of an even numbered year. There are also many individuals with disabilities who are medically frail or receive specialized care, therapy or training for an extended period of time. They may chose not to vote or even forget to vote in one election and then because of the timing of the care they are receiving have logistical challenges voting in the next election.

Fast forward a bit and imagine you are an individual with a cognitive impairment (possibly a brain injury or an individual with an intellectual disability), or anyone else that receives lots of junk mail does not realize they will be kicked off the voter rolls simply because they do not reply to a postcard that slid in between all of that junk mail they receive.

There are also a number of situations where a person with a disability may be move within the same county, possibly because their housing provider went out of business because they could not find enough staff, but that is another problem for another day. They may have every intention of returning to the housing where they established their residency when they first registered to vote. This could impact both college students and seniors that temporarily move to a nursing facility as well.

In the interest of time, I am only pointing out a handful of situations where people with disabilities would be negatively impacted by the changes proposed in this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of our concerns with this bill. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.