

TO: House Committee on Elections
FR: Connie Brown Collins,
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County
Date: January 25, 2023

Dear House Elections Committee:

My name is Connie Brown Collins, Director/Founder of Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County. I live in Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas in the Bethel Welborn Community. We host regular meetings on voting rights and other pertinent issues with a number of participating organizations, both in Wyandotte and Johnson Counties.

I strongly oppose HB 2056 that would abolish the 3-day grace period for mail-in ballots and limit their arrival to Election Day at 7:00 p.m. According to the Kansas Secretary of State, if these restrictions had been in place during the 2020 election more than 32,000 ballots from eligible Kansas citizens would have been thrown out. Voting statistics revealed that 1 in 3 Kansans voted by mail in 2020.

There is no evidence that voting by mail results in significant fraud. As with in-person voting, the threat is small. A number of measures are already in place to ensure ballot security. Kansas has a signature verification process that is utilized prior to sending out a mail-in ballot. A bi-partisan board also conducts a post-election audit.

There is strong bipartisan support for keeping the three-day grace period. Attorney General Kris Kobach has supported the three-day grace period for votes cast on or before election day to ensure that citizens with slower mail delivery, such as rural voters, get their votes counted, too.

This bill amounts to the government punishing citizens for government shortcomings. Rural voters especially, have longer mail delivery times and often don't have easy access to in-person early voting options. Voters should not be disenfranchised because they have slow mail delivered by the government.

Delayed postal service delivery can be detrimental to many groups exercising their right to vote in Kansas elections. Further, due to extenuating circumstances, these groups may not often have adequate access to polling locations, advanced or not. In addition to rural communities, affected voters can include: communities of color, employees who do shift work, elderly and disabled individuals, overseas military service people, students attending college away from home, and working individuals who travel for their jobs.

In my own case, I travelled extensively for my job, requiring me to be away for most election cycles. I would take my mail-in ballot with me to mail from whatever hotel in the country, including Hawaii, where I happened to be working. Though I tried to mail it in plenty of time, I had no guarantees on when my ballot would go out or arrive.

Once my husband became ill and I could no longer travel, I became a full-time caregiver. Caregiving required my complete focus and attention, and was a 24-7 job. I could only get away to mail my ballot when another caregiver was available to come stay with my husband, relieving me to get away for a short period. Unfortunately, I could not risk putting the ballot in my mailbox to be picked up. At times, I was only able to arrange help near or on Election Day.

I'm sure there are many Kansans with similar circumstances, including senior citizens and disabled individuals who must rely on others. I urge you to vote against SB 2056 in order to preserve the rights of the majority of Kansans to have every opportunity for their votes to be counted.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Brown Collins
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County