

January 31st, 2023

Caleb Smith
Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
In Person
House Committee on Elections

Members of the House Committee on Elections:

My name is Caleb Smith; I am a Campaign Director for Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a state full of thriving, inclusive, and just communities.

Kansas Appleseed is neutral on HB 2053. This short bill has a potential for both good and bad in terms of encouraging civic engagement, and we urge you to carefully consider all sides.

Organizations such as Kansas Appleseed spend a great deal of our time encouraging people to vote during elections. We use methods that many of you as elected officials would most likely be familiar with in a nonpartisan manner, simply to encourage a more robust level of civic engagement and public health in our communities.¹ This is done through such traditional methods as sending text messages to remind lower propensity voters that Election Day is coming up, knocking on doors to engage communities about why voting is important, or providing individual voters with information to help them figure out when, where, and how to vote during election season.

One of the biggest difficulties Kansas Appleseed faces on a year to year basis is a lack of consistency. With 105 counties, there are often 105 different ways of doing things when it comes to elections. While leaving control to local entities is typically a positive good, when you are trying to help people across the state comply with time, place, and location restrictions things can get complicated pretty quickly.² Compounding the matter is the fact that oftentimes local officials do not have the resources to always fully make information public and easy to find, even when it comes to voting. This can quickly create a culture with an implied lack of transparency, confusion, and wasted time and resources as organizations like Kansas Appleseed struggle to synthesize information that should be readily and easily available to the average voter.

While uniformity can be helpful, this bill does pose the danger of pooling too much power in one office. For example, while some counties might need two or three drop boxes, others might need four or five to serve the needs of their local populations. Allowing one official in Topeka

¹ Yagoda, N. "Addressing Health Disparities Through Voter Engagement." Annals of Family Medicine. 2019.

<https://www.annfammed.org/content/17/5/459.long>

²https://www.koamnewsnow.com/news/elections/turn-your-early-ballots-in-at-these-drop-box-locations/article_9ecf1ce0-c0fe-5c6e-a478-24266cfec554.html#:~:text=Cherokee%20County%2C%20Kan.%20Cherokee%20County%20does%20not%20have,%23%2031%2C%20Columbus%2C%20KS%2066725%20Crawford%20County%2C%20Kan.

the power to set ceilings rather than floors for access to fundamental rights such as voting can be concerning. The most troubling part of the bill is that it has language stating that the Secretary of State has the power to impose “any other requirements that the secretary deems necessary” to regulate drop boxes. This is a very broad amount of discretion for one office to have.

Kansas Appleseed urges caution when considering HB 2053, which might have the potential to help nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations engage more voters in the civic process, but could also carry the potential for harm as written.