



2023 - 2024 Executive Board

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February 6, 2024 - hearing on HB 2603, establishing the citizens' election oversight board – Proponent testimony from Rick Piepho, representing KCCEOA.

Chairman Proctor and Distinguished Committee Members,

My name is Rick Piepho, Harvey County Clerk and Chairman of the Elections Committee of the Kansas County Clerks and Election Officials Association (KCCEOA). The KCCEOA is a statewide organization with 109 members including all county clerks and election commissioners in Kansas. Our duties are significant under statute and one of our most public facing functions is free and fair administration of elections. We take this duty very seriously. We prepare for every possible, and impossible, scenario which could occur.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the KCCEOA membership. We understand and agree with the intent to build on the already secure election processes in Kansas and increasing voter confidence. The KCCEOA prepared a legislative agenda which was developed through a policy committee process and agreed to by a majority of the members. One of the items specifically included is: "Support initiatives which build on already secure and transparent election equipment and processes".

We support efforts to increase voter confidence in election procedures and processes and we believe that the creation of a Citizens' Election Oversight Board will further that goal. This bill represents an important step towards enhancing the transparency, accountability, and integrity of our electoral processes. This legislation empowers an independent and bipartisan group of citizens to review, investigate, and report on complaints regarding election conduct and procedures. This mechanism will provide citizens with a structured and impartial avenue to voice concerns.

We believe that the diverse composition of this board with representatives from each of the political parties, as well as non-partisan members, ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, promoting fairness and inclusivity. We appreciate that this board will include a member of our association as a nonvoting member along with designees from the Secretary of State and Attorney General. We agree on the importance of having a local election official on this board that has expertise on election processes and conducting elections to provide input accordingly.

This bill outlines a transparent process for handling complaints, including the option for public hearings. The provisions for dismissing unsubstantiated complaints and referring valid concerns to appropriate authorities demonstrates a commitment to efficiency and effectiveness in addressing electoral issues. We believe that the requirement for this board to submit an annual report to the legislature and the governor enhances transparency and will keep stakeholders informed about the board's activities, statistics on complaints, and any recommendations for improvements. We agree with the inclusion of a sunset provision, with a review in 2029, to ensure that the board remains relevant and effective, with the opportunity for adjustments or reauthorization based on its performance.

The KCCEOA supports HB 2603 as presented. We encourage the committee to support and advance this bill. I will gladly stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Sincerely,

Rick Piepho
Harvey County Clerk & Election Officer – KCCEOA Elections Committee Chair