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Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
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Written Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber in Opposition to SB365, Requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7 p.m. on election day.

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs, Sen. Mike Thompson, chair

February 6, 2024

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical racial, economic and climate justice issues. I submit testimony in opposition to SB 365.

KIFA has for years now worked in coalitions to expand voting rights in Kansas. In these matters our guiding principle has been that ***everyone who is eligible to vote in Kansas should be allowed and encouraged to vote***, that there should be no unnecessary legal or bureaucratic impediments to either registration or voting. Thanks to the hard work of our coalition and voting champions in the legislature, there have been great strides taken in bringing Kansas out of the dark ages of Kobach-era voter suppression. But this bill would move us back in the wrong direction.

By all accounts, the 2020 and both 2022 elections in Kansas were rousing successes. Record numbers of people voted, both in primaries and in general elections. The mail-in, drop-off and in-person voting mechanism all worked exactly the way they were supposed to. Kansas’ three-day deadline for return of advanced ballots worked well; most of the results were in on election night and those that weren’t, were finished within a few days.

It’s important to state clearly: ***there is no evidence of widespread election fraud***, certainly not in Kansas, and certainly not anything having to do with mail ballots. Yet we still see bills like this and others that would make it harder to vote by artificially and unnecessarily shortening the time limit for votes to be received - the proverbial solution looking for a problem.

It’s worth pointing out that the impact of this bill would be felt most by rural voters, who are more likely to rely on mail ballots. All of us have had the experience of the mail taking days to arrive, which is a problem that seems to be getting worse -- that’s why this grace period exists, so that people who remember to vote by election day can have those votes counted. That’s why the law this bill is meant to overturn was passed on a bipartisan basis.

Members of the committee, Kansas does not have a problem with mail ballots. Vague nostalgia for a past when “election day was election day” should not be the basis for overturning a sensible law that allows tens of thousands of Kansans a safe, secure and timely way to vote. This bill would make it harder for people to vote, exactly the opposite of what our policy should be. It’s unnecessary and it’s wrong. Please vote against SB 356.