

January 25, 2024

House Committee on Elections
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to House Bill 2512 - requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7pm on the second day before election day.

Chair Proctor and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in opposition to House Bill 2512. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. We oppose this legislation as it will negatively impact Kansans' voting access, as well as their livelihoods and wellbeing. Voting rights are an important social driver of health, as determined by the American Medical Association. Requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7pm two days before election day cuts directly against that. According to the Health and Democracy Index, the more inclusive and expansive voting access is, the better the health outcomes are for a state.

Barriers to voting access should be reduced not amplified. According to official data from the Kansas Secretary of State, despite record high turnout, almost 48% of registered voters did not exercise their power to vote in 2022. This legislation would make it harder for people to vote in advance by mail and would invalidate Constitutionally protected votes. In the same election, nearly 130,000 Kansans sent in advance ballots by mail, about 13% of all votes cast. Requiring advance mail in ballots to be returned *before* election day jeopardizes those tens of thousands of people who voted by mail.

HB 2512 creates unnecessary barriers that will lead to hard-working people in rural communities in Kansas not having their votes counted because of the distance to travel to drop off a ballot. It would harm those with obligations to childcare, caring for a sick or elderly adult, or work by giving them less flexibility to cast their vote to meet their schedule. Additionally, this type of harmful legislation would affect Kansans of color most adversely, according to a Brennan Center for Justice study.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote no on HB 2512. We would instead encourage the legislature to support ways to increase voter turnout and civic engagement in Kansas to empower citizens to participate more freely in the democratic process. Please feel free to contact me at nmadden@healthforward.org

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D., Impact Strategist - Policy
Health Forward Foundation

**OUR
PURPOSE**

Every day we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.