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HB 2056 Requiring all advanced voting ballots be returned by 7 p.m. on election day

Opposition Testimony to be presented orally in person

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I am writing in opposition to HB 2056 which seeks to change the final deadline for accepting ballots to 7 pm on Election Day regardless of whether the ballot was postmarked before Election Day. Voting by mail has been a part of the electoral process for decades whether people realized it or not. I voted by mail for the first time in 1992 as a college student doing a semester abroad in London. I wanted to make sure to participate in my civic duty. Not only that, but I often remind myself that many of my ancestors fought, marched, and protested for me, a Black person from Kansas, to have the right to vote. I filled out my ballot and got it back in the mail as quickly as I could. After all, it was a long way back to Kansas City, Kansas from London. College students, military families, and people who travel for work all rely on mail voting. Additionally, there are people with physical disabilities for whom standing in line to vote would be a hardship and people in long-term care facilities, and who have relied on mail ballots to ensure their voices are heard.

Last session I contacted the Johnson County Election Office and asked for the number of valid ballots from the 2020 election cycle that arrived during the 3-day grace period. All the ballots were clearly postmarked before Election Day and for whatever reason, they arrived after 7 pm on Election Day. The official count? 1478. That number may seem low, but that is the count from only Johnson County in an odd year, a local election where turnout is notoriously low. Those three days of ballots changed the outcome of at least one race for the Olathe School Board. In past years several races were decided when official valid ballots continued to come in.

Under HB 2056 those 1478 votes would be thrown out. Those 1478 voters would be disenfranchised. Those 1478 people, who followed the rules and jumped the hoops would have their voices stifled due to a delay in the mail system.

I was present last year for the hearing on SB 388 Requiring the use of the United States postal service when returning an advance ballot by mail. I actually learned then that several Senators represent areas where even local mail is sent as far away as Kansas City, Missouri, Nebraska, or Oklahoma for processing before being delivered. That is the system set in place. It seems that that extended mail cycle may take a few days to complete. A three-day grace period would help ensure that the votes of rural Kansas have a chance to be counted. I urge you to vote no and not pass this bill out of committee.