

March 9, 2023

House Committee on Elections  
State Capitol  
300 SW 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Topeka, KS 66612

**Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to Senate Bill 209 - requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7pm on 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 Senate Bill 209. 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 people's livelihoods and wellbeing. Voting rights are an important social influencer of health, as recently determined by the American Medical Association, and this bill requiring all advance voting ballots to be returned by 7pm on 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, over 29% of eligible voters chose not to exercise their power to vote in 2020. In the same election, nearly 460,000 Kansans sent in advance ballots by mail, which is a 90% return rate for ballots sent out. This legislation would make it harder for people to vote in advance by mail and would invalidate Constitutionally protected votes. Advance mail in balloting should be protected, as it is the second most utilized means of casting a ballot in Kansas, as of 2020.

SB 209 creates unnecessary barriers that will most assuredly lead to hard-working people in rural communities in Kansas not having their votes counted because of distance to travel to drop off a ballot. It would harm those with obligations to childcare, care for a sick or elderly adult, or work by giving them less options to vote as their schedule demands. 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 SB 209. 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 [jwilliams@healthforward.org](mailto:jwilliams@healthforward.org).

Respectfully,

Jason Williams  
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.*