

LOUD LIGHT CIVIC ACTION

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Loud Light Civic Action
Opponent Testimony of HB 2452
For the House Elections Committee

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Chair Proctor and members of the Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Melissa Stiehler, and I serve as Advocacy Director of Loud Light Civic Action, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that supports and builds the civic engagement and leadership of young people in Kansas. We represent over 16,000 Kansans, including supporters in every House and Senate district across the state. Loud Light Civic Action's primary goal above all else is to ensure all Kansans can exercise their right to vote in a free and fair election. It is with these values that Loud Light Civic Action opposes HB 2452.

Partisanship over Evidence: Substantial changes are being proposed without substantial vetting.

The primary concern we have with HB 2452 is the lack of due diligence that is happening while proposing a major shift in our electoral laws. Our current elections calendar was a result of a tremendous amount of effort by this legislative body, with the last changes happening after hearing multiple bills and studying this issue through a special committee. From the [supplemental notes](#) on the special committee:

At the end of the 2014 Legislative Session, a study was requested on the topic and assigned to the Special Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government. The Special Committee heard directly from three other states' experts on the challenges and benefits of combining elections, either completely or partially, in those states.

*The Special Committee also heard from the author of purportedly the only scholarly book published on the subject, *Timing and Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*. The author's work concluded off-cycle election timing enhances the effectiveness of organized groups' mobilization efforts.*

This due diligence simply isn't happening for HB 2452. It is being proposed to change dates that were enacted only 11 years ago. There has been no deep study into its impact. There is no effort to ensure its intended effectiveness. While the 2015 bill included section 14 requiring the SoS to educate voters on the change, there is no voter education included in this bill. It seems as though this proposal is based on the [hyper-partisan trend](#) that both Republicans and Democrats engage in when they hold and want to maintain their majority, rather than based on real evidence that consolidating elections is actually good for Kansas voters.

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Impact on Local Candidates, Local Issues & Local Engagement Resources

We are concerned that local issues will be eclipsed by national campaigns. It seems likely that local government issues, such as schools and potholes, will simply be unable to compete with the attention of presidential candidates and national politics, such as national economic conditions and foreign policy. The cost of campaigning increases during national elections. Everything from the cost of ads to the availability of printers to the capacity of volunteers is more scarce.

Voter Drop Off vs Voter Turn Out

While there is evidence that voter turnout does increase with election consolidation, there is not enough evidence to confirm that the voter turnout rate is substantial enough to overcome issues with voter confusion and drop off from lengthy and complicated ballots. This issue has been [mentioned](#) by Rick Piepho, chair of the elections committee of the Kansas County Clerks and Elections Officials Association. “The biggest issue is you’re potentially going to end up with a multi-sheet ballot because now you have so much stuff on there that it won’t all fit on one sheet of paper,” he said. “So now you have the voter confusion of, what do I do with multiple sheets of paper and do I even vote the second sheet of paper if all I’m worried about is the president,” he said.

Abolishing Odd-Year Elections could Impact the Development of Habitual Voters

The benefit of having an election every year is the potential to develop a cyclical habit in voters, with a clear understanding that it is their civic duty to vote every August and November. This consistency creates a healthy civil culture within our community and leads to better habits with civic education and lifelong voting.

Ballot Length & Logistics

How many pages would a single ballot be and how many more types of ballots would need to be created to accommodate for local boundaries? What type of new processes would need to be in place to ensure there isn’t an increase in error rates for lengthy mail ballots? Would local bond issues & explainers + state constitutional amendments & explainers all be on the same ballot? Is it possible that postage costs would increase beyond a typical stamp for multiple pages?

Likely Does Not Reduce Costs, Could Create Complications

Because of the variety of ballot styles that will need to be prepared to accommodate the multitude of district overlaps, counties have [previously estimated](#) no savings and potentially additional expense.

2028 Potential Ballot Change Already in Motion – Supreme Court Justice Election Amendment

Based on the outcome of the special amendment election this August, there may already be changes coming to the ballot layout beginning in 2028 that would impact ballot design and space.

Conclusion: Loud Light Civic Action opposes HB 2452 at this time and encourages the committee to engage in the due diligence to ensure that any major changes proposed to our electoral laws have been fully vetted with evidence based conclusions for any recommendations. Thank you all for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration.