

TO: Sen. Mike Thompson, Chair
Senate State and Federal Affairs Committee
RE: SB 4 – Written Only Testimony - Opponent
FR: Connie Brown Collins
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County
DT: Jan. 22, 2025

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee:

I'd like to thank the committee for providing this opportunity to share my thoughts on SB 4. My name is Connie Brown Collins, Founder/Executive Director of Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County. I live in Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas. Our organization hosts regular informational and educational meetings and events on voting rights and other pertinent issues in collaboration with numerous participating organizations and committed individuals, both from Wyandotte and Johnson Counties.

I strongly oppose SB 4 that would abolish the three-day grace period for mail-in ballots and limit their arrival to Election Day at 7:00 p.m. For 30 years, every registered Kansas voter has had the option to vote by mail. In the last election, 10% of all Kansas voters cast their ballot through mail voting. Throughout those years, mail voting has proven to be a safe, secure, and efficient voting method that benefits both citizens and local election offices.

There is no evidence that voting by mail results in significant fraud. As with in-person voting, the threat is small. A number of measures are already in place to ensure ballot security. Kansas has a signature verification process that is utilized prior to sending out a mail-in ballot. A bi-partisan board also conducts a post-election audit.

There has been strong bipartisan support for keeping the three-day grace period. The only impact of this law would be to count fewer Kansans votes, which is why every effort to repeal this protection has faced strong bipartisan opposition. The extremists behind this legislation have incorrectly claimed there is a partisan advantage to this protection. The facts show that voting by mail was nearly equally utilized between the two major political parties in the last election. The three-day grace period for votes cast on or before election day ensures that citizens with slower mail delivery, such as rural voters, get their votes counted, too.

This bill punishes voters for government shortcomings. Rural voters especially, have longer mail delivery times and often don't have easy access to in-person early voting options. Military personnel and their families, especially those overseas, may also need the additional time due to delayed mail delivery. Voters should not be disenfranchised because they have slow mail delivered by the government.

Delayed postal service delivery can be detrimental to many groups exercising their right to vote in Kansas elections. Further, due to extenuating circumstances, these groups may not often have adequate access to polling locations, advanced or not. In addition to rural communities, affected voters can include: communities of color, employees who do shift work, elderly and disabled individuals, overseas military service families, students attending college away from home, and working individuals who travel for their jobs.

In my own case, I travelled extensively for my job, requiring me to be away for many election cycles. I would take my mail-in ballot with me to mail from whatever hotel in the country, including Hawaii, where I happened to be working. Though I tried to mail it in plenty of time, I had no guarantees on when my ballot would go out or arrive.

Once my husband became ill and I could no longer travel, I became a full-time caregiver. Caregiving required my complete focus and attention, and was a 24-7 job. I could only get away to mail my ballot when another caregiver was available to come stay with my husband, relieving me for a short period. Unfortunately, I could not risk putting the ballot in my mailbox to be picked up. At times, I was only able to arrange help near or on Election Day.

My next-door neighbor, who is a senior and disabled, must rely on others to either take her to the polls or mail her ballot, either of which might not be able to be arranged until close to or on Election Day. I'm sure there are many Kansans with similar circumstances, including other senior citizens and disabled individuals who must depend on help to mail or cast a ballot.

Thank you again for providing this opportunity. I urge you to vote against SB 4 in order to ensure that Kansans have every opportunity for their votes to be counted.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Brown Collins

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Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County