

22 January 2025

Bill Number: SB 4

Opposition Written Testimony

Stacey Knoell, Executive Director, Kansas African American Affairs Commission

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in opposition to SB 4 which seeks to change the final deadline for accepting ballots to 7 pm on Election Day regardless of whether the ballot was postmarked on or before Election Day. This history of voting in America began as a privilege restricted to a very small slice of the population. As access slowly expanded, voting by mail has been a part of the electoral process for decades whether or not people realized its prevalence. Additionally, countless people fought, marched, and protested to expand the right to vote. The arc of history has witnessed wider access to the ballot box and the changes proposed by SB 4 would take this state backward as a representative democracy. 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 who have relied on mail ballots to ensure their voices are heard.

While there is much discussion concerning the exact number of ballots that would be disallowed, eliminating the mail ballot processing window will disenfranchise thousands of voters who have done everything correctly. A voter who placed their ballot in the mail the Friday before an election may find their ballot thrown out as illegitimate. This is of special concern in rural areas where mail must leave the state for processing. This bill effectively punishes voters who have done everything right due to the inefficiency of the United States Postal Service. Under SB 4, thousands of voters will be disenfranchised each election cycle. Kansas heavily relies on voting by mail, and in 2020 alone 32,367 ballots arrived after Election Day. A processing period ensures that the votes of all Kansans, both rural and urban, have an opportunity to be counted. Indeed, this was the prevailing logic surrounding the implementation of the 3-day processing window in the first place. That original change passed through the legislature with near unanimous support.

Lastly, many election skeptics want "Election Day to be Election Day" as if the vote count at 7 pm on that Tuesday is the final ballot count. Rather than disenfranchising thousands of voters, perhaps implement a plan to educate voters on how votes are counted and why the tally may legitimately change after 7 pm rather than giving into conspiracy theories that see any change in tally as evidence of fraud.

I urge you to vote no and not pass this bill out of committee.