

March 3rd, 2025

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to Senate Bill 231 – regarding changes to advance mail in voting ballot application.

Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 231. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by economically just systems. We oppose this legislation as it will make it more difficult for people to submit advance mail in ballots. Voting rights are an important social driver of health, as determined by the American Medical Association, and this bill would change rules and confuse those using advance mail in ballots. 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 the Kansas Secretary of State, almost one-third of eligible voters chose not to exercise their power to vote in 2024. This legislation would make it harder for people to vote in advance through mail as they may not understand that the need to provide an envelope and postage has changed. In the same election, over 150,000 Kansans sent in advance ballots by mail. Advance mail in balloting should be protected, as it accounts for more than one in ten votes cast.

SB 231 creates unnecessary barriers that will confuse voters who use the advance mail in ballot voting process, especially those in rural areas or people who are living with disabilities. Oftentimes, these individuals may not have easy access to postage and mail envelopes through a Post Office. Local elections offices should have the option to choose whether or not to provide these items.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote no on SB 231. 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 nmadden@healthforward.org

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D.
Impact Strategist – Policy
Health Forward Foundation