

Opponent Oral Testimony on House Bill 2516

House Committee on Elections

Davis Hammet – Loud Light Civic Action

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Chair Proctor, Members of the Committee,

Redundancy: Independent Candidates are Already Blocked from Filing Fee Option

Already in Kansas law independents have no option to pay a filing fee in lieu of meeting the signature requirement. Put another way, if you align yourself with a political party you can buy your way onto the ballot, but if you reject associating yourself with a political party you must work to appear on the ballot.

Over 550,000 Registered Kansans Reject Political Party Affiliation

As of November 2023, the Secretary of State reported 554,236 Kansans are registered to vote as unaffiliated, meaning they chose not to associate with a political party. That's over 28% of the state's total registered voters making it the second largest affiliation in Kansas after Republicans.

Quintupling the Burden on Independents & Election Administrators (from 5,000 to 25,000)

The process of gathering 5,000 signatures is resource intensive. As is the process of having government officials validate them. This bill proposes to quintuple the burden by requiring 5x the number of signatures. This is not just 5x the burden on candidates, but 5x the review and validation burden on the government. This may result in further delays for an independent to find out if they will even appear on the ballot. A timing burden that would come right as elections heat up and timing is crucial. Given existing obstacles in state law that hinder independent campaigns, it's hard to see this bill as anything more than a bureaucratic way to outlaw independent candidates or at least to outlaw any Kansan of modest means from appearing on the ballot as an independent.

Political Party Power Consolidation

Kansas has a recent history of passing laws designed to discourage, undermine, and deny independent candidates from pursuing public office. Often these laws come from specific grievances about specific candidates. Such was the case in a variety of policies passed following Greg Orman's independent bid for the U.S. Senate in 2014, and such is the case with this bill following Dennis Pyle's independent bid for Governor in 2022. The structural burdens on independents range from more relaxed campaign finance mechanisms for political parties (county and state committees acting as pass through funding entities to bypass campaign contribution limits) to the signature and validation requirement itself.

Conclusion

Because HB2516 consolidates political party power as citizens, especially young Kansans, increasingly reject associating themselves with political parties and creates unnecessary burdens on the pursuit of public service for Kansans who reject party affiliation, we recommend this committee oppose HB2516. Thank you. I'm happy to stand for any questions when appropriate.