

Date: February 20, 2017

To: Representative Esau, Chair, Kansas House Committee on Elections

Re: Testimony on HB 2225 Relating to Mail in Ballots

From: Marge Ahrens, Co-President, The League of Women Voters of Kansas

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2225 relating to the opening of the possibility of vote-by-mail (VBM) for Kansas citizens. Twenty two states now have some form of VBM legislation, with Colorado, Washington, Oregon and soon California choosing this route for all elections in their states.

Polling places in Kansas have shrunk in numbers and changed locations without notice. Those persons without transportation find themselves unable to access a polling place because of distances from where they live, no matter if their homes are in rural communities or in cities. We have spoken with candidates who found in their canvassing that Kansans want the convenience of voting from home. Kansans want to vote as measured by the thousands with incomplete (suspense) registrations, provisional ballots and cancelled registrations which could not materialize into a vote under current Kansas election law (specifically, the "S.A.F.E. Act") in the November 8, 2016 Kansas general election.

This committee has already approved legislation which would demand notification of change of polling places. You have approved deadlines for receipt of mail- in ballots by three days later than election day and extension of the deadline for canvassing to adapt to changed realities of U.S. mail service. You are working on audit and voting equipment legislation to assure the accuracy of the vote. You have taken careful action to respond to the real needs of Kansas so that they might participate in government and enjoy the precious right to vote.

The League of Women Voters of Kansas would need more time to evaluate the results of VBM in other states. But we are passionate about protecting and fostering the vote for ALL, an attitude integral to participatory democracy and for which a million persons have lost their lives. The permanent mail in ballot is one option worth research and discussion in Kansas.

We recommend a careful analysis of Kansas election laws in regard to the voices of ALL Kansans who are the source of power in our democracy. Our laws should be analyzed in terms of the common good, such as ease of access in registration and voting, costs in time, transportation and equity for the citizen no matter what their resources, costs to local

governments in administration of the laws, and costs to state government in administration, enforcement, and defense of the laws in courts. Kansas legislators need an unbiased analysis of the potential for voter fraud in relation to current and future voter legislation.

It is the attitudes of equity, openness, and determination to protect the vote for ALL that the League of Women Voters seeks in our elected representatives. Thank you for your service to that end.