

To: Senator Elaine Bowers and Members of the Senate Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government

From: Marge Ahrens and Carole Neal, Co-Presidents, League of Women Voters of Kansas

Re: HB 2158 relating to canvassing of mail in ballots

Date: March 21, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to HB 2158 relating to the acceptance of advanced ballots at county election offices and all polling places by the close of the election on election day, and acceptance of votes by mail which are marked by the end of the hour of the closing of polls on any election day.

The League of Women Voters of Kansas supports this bill. We are enthusiastic about enhancing the opportunities for voter participation in the ballot at their convenience. The bill provides the minimal necessary three days for those "on time" ballots to actually arrive at their election offices because of the routing of mail following cutbacks in the U.S. Post Service. We see this bill as reflecting the desire of the Legislature to serve the real needs of both rural and urban Kansas voters, and cut the costs of voting to all our citizens in transportation and time. We have one question related to the proposed rulemaking by the Secretary of State in this matter. County election offices of every size have processed mail in ballots since their inception. We do not support the idea of a need for every Kansas county to have a special canvassing board for mail in ballots only. Rural and smaller counties might experience the demand for a special canvassing board as a burden.

We do, however, highly recommend training of all canvassers in regard to the handling of mail in ballots. In the November, 2016 General Election only three of 12 counties surveyed categorized mail in ballots that did not have the return address on the front of the envelope as subject to denial of the vote. Johnson County denied 307, Saline County denied 5 and Wyandotte County denied 4 votes for this stated reason. Douglas County sought a legal opinion and was told that the U.S. Postal Service barcode on the front of the envelope was sufficient to prove vote validity.

Numerous other discrepancies in the counting of provisional ballots by local canvassing boards indicate that the more complex the laws, the more difficult it becomes to administer them evenly across the state. The League of Women Voters of Kansas would hope that your legislative

efforts in regard to the vote turn toward a philosophy of supporting the right to vote for all Kansas citizens, and making both registration and voting itself conform to that belief with attitudes of welcoming and acceptance of the vote for all.

Best practices at the polls such as election day voter registration and mail in ballots prove greater and wider voter participation in the many states across the nation which have adopted those laws.