



To: House Elections Committee
From: Kim Winn, Deputy Director
Date: March 13, 2013
Re: Opposition to HB 2227

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today in opposition to HB 2227. This legislation would alter elections for all 626 incorporated cities in Kansas. Our membership has expressed strong opposition to the changes proposed in this bill and we offer the following key concerns.

Fall Elections. HB 2227 would move all local elections to fall of odd-numbered years. Proponents suggest that individuals would be more likely to remember to vote in the fall and perhaps the weather would be better. But, this proposal would simply change one free-standing election to another free-standing election. And, it is pure conjecture to suggest that individuals would automatically know that election day is coming up just because it is fall. Voters realize that it is time to cast their ballots because they begin to see yard signs, candidates go door-to-door, candidate fliers are mailed, newspapers cover the key issues, etc.

And, as we all well know, there can be a bad weather day at almost any time in Kansas. That certainly does not justify such a dramatic change. If inclement weather is truly a concern, perhaps consideration should be given to authorizing the Secretary of State to declare an emergency and move the election to a more suitable date.

Procedural Concerns. This bill would impact the elections for all 3,812 elected city officials in Kansas and the drafting of the bill raises some serious procedural concerns. First, there are internal inconsistencies in the bill including whether terms of office will be staggered and whether the terms will be two or four years. New section 1 seems to suggest everyone will be reelected in 2015 and there will be no stagger. New section 2 seems to leave the terms of office up to the governing body to establish by ordinance. Further, section 28 seems to mandate both a stagger and a four-year term.

New section 1 seems to suggest that persons who are currently holding office and those who may be elected in April of 2015 would be removed from office by this legislation. This portion of the bill presumes that all 3,812 city elected positions would be up for election in the fall of 2015 (including those who are being elected in the spring of that same year).

Sections 13, 14, and 15 deal with partisanship and should not be in this legislation if the intent is to allow for non-partisan city elections.

Voter Turnout. Lack of voter turnout is often cited as the reason for this legislation. Voter turnout has been declining in presidential elections since 1960. And, while it is

important that individuals exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to vote, voter turnout is not the only indicator of the civic health of a community. Some individuals may be relatively content and may choose not to vote. Others may only be interested in the larger constitutional issues raised at the state and federal level.

I would posit that if voter turnout numbers are the primary reason for this change, there are better ways to engage the citizenry than to alter the election date. Perhaps we should be working together to find ways to enhance civic education so that our students, and all Kansans, understand the value of government at all levels and the importance of their participation. Through such a dialogue, we certainly could find solutions which would affect the overall participation of our citizens in government generally.

I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.