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House Committee on Elections
Testimony on HB 2158
Jamie Shew, Douglas County Clerk

Chairman Esau and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2158 and allowing this opportunity to raise awareness of the impact of recent postal reforms on mail advance ballots.

In 2011-12, the U. S. Postal Service started implementing reforms which reduced the number of mail processing centers, limited weekend processing and routed mail to larger regional centers. In Kansas, seven processing centers were closed and mail is now routed to regional processing centers, two in Kansas, Wichita and Hutchinson, and three in other states, Amarillo, TX, North Platte, NE, and Kansas City, Missouri. With the regional centers, the methods which mail was processed were also changed; the largest impact of these changes was increased time for delivery. The U.S. Postal Service no longer guarantees 1-2 day delivery for local mail, but now has a 2-5 day window for delivery of First Class local mail. During the 2016 elections, the U.S. Postal Service was recommending voters mail ballots at least one week ahead of Election Day in states that require receipt of ballot on that day. Additionally, with new limited weekend processing, mail sent on Friday and Saturday may not begin processing until Monday, the result has been a decrease in delivered mail on Tuesday across the country. Across Kansas, as these changes have occurred, county election offices have experienced an increase in ballots not arriving until the Wednesday or Thursday after Election Day. Currently, these ballots cannot be counted; when often times it is clear the ballot was sent days before the election.

I support HB 2158 as one step in attempting to respond to the challenges presented with the new postal process. States are being encouraged to consider legislation which meets the reality of new delivery structures and times. As more voters are utilizing mail advance ballots, continuing to utilize statutes written during different era of postal delivery will result in a higher amount of votes not counted.

In addition to support of HB 2158, I also encourage your committee to consider additional changes. K.S.A. 25-1122 establishes the Friday before an election as the deadline to apply for a mail ballot. The U.S. Postal Service states late application deadlines are unserviceable and encourage changes in those deadlines to reflect accurate delivery times. Additionally, K.S.A. 2908(f), states a mail ballot returned to a polling place must be spoiled by the board workers and the voter issued a provisional ballot. This can be confusing to the voter and increases the number of provisional ballots processed by election board workers. I encourage consideration of a change which allows mail ballots to be returned to the polling place on Election Day.

Thank you for your consideration, respectfully request you support HB 2158 and encourage your support of additional legislation which would maintain a voter centric approach to challenges of current postal procedures. I am available to stand for questions at the appropriate time.