



TESTIMONY OF
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IN SUPPORT OF SB 78
KANSAS SENATE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS, ELECTIONS, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
FEBRUARY 8, 2017

- WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY -

Thank you, Chair Bowers, and members of the Ethics, Elections, and Local Government Committee for affording us the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 78.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Kansas is a non-partisan, non-political membership organization dedicated to preserving and strengthening the constitutional liberties afforded to every resident of Kansas. We work to preserve and strengthen our constitutional rights and freedoms through policy advocacy, litigation, and education. We proudly serve over 10,000 supporters in Kansas and represent more than 1 million supporters nationwide.

The ACLU of Kansas strongly supports SB 78. SB 78 would alter existing law to ensure that all registered voters are provided with ample notice of changes in polling locations. The ACLU of Kansas supports SB 78 because:

- **The bill removes an obstacle to voter participation and provides stronger protection for the constitutional right to vote.** Although early and absentee voting have grown more popular in Kansas, a large percentage of all votes are still cast at polling places on Election Day. When polling places are moved, it hampers the ability of voters to participate in the process. Although some voters who arrive at a location no longer in use are able to identify the new location, others are not and are dissuaded entirely from voting. Making this simple change will protect the right to vote.
- **Polling place changes have been used to disenfranchise voters, but SB 78 weakens the potential for or appearance of disenfranchisement.** Throughout American history, moving the polling place at the last minute has frequently been used as a tactic for discouraging voter participation, excluding voters of color, or suppressing voters of a particular partisan or ideological persuasion. Although use of this tactic has diminished considerably, the moving of polling places can still carry this baggage and undermine public confidence in elections. By strengthening the notice requirement of polling place changes, SB 78 weakens the potential for real, unintentional, or imagined disenfranchisement.
- **The change the bill makes is a minor one, which imposes a minimal administrative burden.** Asking county election officers to have polling places secured in advance of the election and to provide 30 days' notice of changes to affected voters is reasonable. The bill provides an exception for genuine emergencies.

We urge the committee to support SB 78.