



TESTIMONY OF

MELISSA STIEHLER

SENIOR ORGANIZER, AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF KANSAS

IN SUPPORT OF SB 43

**KANSAS SENATE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS, ELECTIONS AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

FEBRUARY 19, 2019

Thank you, Chair Bowers, and members of the Committee for affording us the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 43.

I'm Melissa Stiehler, the Senior Organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas, more simply known as the ACLU of Kansas. The 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 40,000 supporters in Kansas and represent more than 1.7 million supporters nationwide.

I lead our statewide Citizen Participation Campaign and have been traveling the state speaking with Kansas voters and your constituents about how they would like to increase citizen participation in their own communities. The vast majority of issues brought to my attention are those that would be resolved with Election Day Registration. Things like not understanding arbitrary registration deadlines, moving, changing your name, or for first time voters, knowing you need to register at all. We know that democracy is stronger when more people participate, and your constituents support this common sense legislation that would help increase citizen participation.

I speak here today for nearly 4,000 volunteers who have signed up to advocate for this legislation within the past year, some of whom have joined us in the hearing today.

The ACLU of Kansas and our member and volunteer base strongly support implementing election-day registration in Kansas. Specifically, the ACLU of Kansas supports SB 43 because:

- Election-day voter registration is a proven tool for increasing voter turnout. States with election-day registration, including Idaho, Iowa, Montana, Utah and Wisconsin, have turnout rates 10-12% higher than states without it. Most importantly, four of the top five states for high voter turnout have election-day voter registration, and other forms of civic engagement are also higher in these states.
- Election-day registration reaches historically disenfranchised voters. Members of the military, geographically mobile people, the elderly, young people, voters of color, lower-income Americans, and busy professionals all benefit from election-day registration, and it is widely used by citizens across the political and demographic spectrum. Members of the military who frequently move, young people who may change addresses, have a particularly hard time registering by arbitrary deadlines, and would benefit from same-day registration. Census data show that over 36 million people in America moved between 2011 and 2012, and nearly half of those moving had low-incomes. Election-day registration could have an impact on increasing turnout for all Kansans, but is particularly important for the poorest and most marginalized voter.
- Election-day registration is easy to implement, non-controversial, and used throughout the United States. Election-day voter registration can be implemented in Kansas alongside existing voter ID requirements. The administrative costs and challenges of implementing the system are negligible. Surveys of local election officials in 7 states using election-day registration found that costs were “minimal” and no additional staff was needed. Election-day registration ensured that voters were providing their most recent and accurate domicile, which would be helpful for maintaining the most accurate voter rolls. The system is so non-controversial that it has been adopted under Republicans and Democrats, is used in 17 states, and the District of Columbia pending 2019 implementation in 1.

If you have any questions regarding specific elements of the bill language, I'd refer you to our Policy Director, Letitia Harmon lharmon@aclukansas.org, but I am happy to answer questions about current constituent issues that this legislation could resolve.