



Date: December 10, 2014  
To: Special Committee on Ethics, Elections & Local Government  
From: Michael Koss  
Re: Information on Kansas Cities' Governing Body Terms and Cycles

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today on behalf of the League of Kansas Municipalities to present information on Kansas cities' governing body terms and election cycles.

State statutes provide a framework for city elections. However, to better reflects their citizens' values, many Kansas cities have opted to use their Constitutional Home Rule authority to set up their own combination of terms, wards, and elections cycles. They have done this by passing charter ordinances, which are subject to citizen protest.

The League conducted a survey on the various governing body and election systems that cities have in place. Officials from 116 cities responded to our survey - the following are some of the key findings:

- **Timing:** All 116 cities reported that their elections are held in the spring. Four (3%) hold their spring elections every four years, 96 (83%) hold their spring elections every two years, and 15 (13%) hold their spring elections annually. This indicates that a majority of cities have chosen to hold elections more frequently than required by statute.
- **Length of Terms:** Seventeen cities (15%) reported governing body terms of two years, while 89 (85%) reported terms of four years. Many cities have lengthened their governing body members' terms beyond their two-year statutory presumptions. Some cities value continuity or the presence of institutional knowledge on the governing body. Also, many cities reported using hybrid systems, with different terms based on position or vote total.
- **Staggered Terms:** Seven cities (6%) reported that they did not have staggered terms, while 108 (94%) reported having staggered terms. There are no statutory presumptions for staggered terms, so this is another instance of cities actively establishing their own systems to best match their communities' preferences. Communities may want to have gradual change on the governing body, while others may want to provide citizens with more frequent access to the ballot box.
- **Wards:** Twenty-two cities (19%) reported that they had wards, while 94 (81%) reported that they did not utilize wards. Of those cities with ward systems, most cities have 3-4 wards, with 2 representatives for each ward.

I'd also like to note that our member cities and the League are taking steps to bolster voter turnout in local elections. At our annual conference, our Executive Director hosted a roundtable on tips to increase voter turnout in municipal elections. That information will be used in an upcoming article in the *Kansas Government Journal* about increasing voter turnout, along with a webinar that we're hosting in a couple months. The League is also considering a contest, with an award(s) going to the city or cities with the highest voter turnout in municipal elections.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on this important issue. We look forward to working with the Legislature and collaborating with the Secretary of State's office to increase voter turnout.