

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

TESTIMONY SB 78

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2017

Chairman Esau and Committee:

Thank you for hearing SB 78. I am testifying in support of SB 78 today. I can relate to the concerns regarding the confusion involved in polling location changes and the need for adequate notification.

For the 2012 elections, Shawnee County reduced the number of polling locations from 156 to 100 sites across the county. This was a particular problem for voters in the Montara subdivision, south of Topeka. Prior to the change, there were two polling locations located at public schools on the east and west edges of the subdivision. Their polling place was moved to the Forbes Field Airport, across US 75 and about a mile from the previous locations.

After the election, voters and school officials told me that many voters still came to the schools to vote. On the door of the schools was a paper posted saying that the school was no longer a polling location and they should call the number listed on the paper. Voters said when they tried to call that number (the county election office), it rang busy for hours. They could not find out where the new polling location was. Some just gave up and did not vote at all.

There are several concerns here. One is that moving the polling location in a low-income neighborhood can disenfranchise voters who have no transportation. My understanding is that the voters were sent bright-colored postcards about the polling location change. I'm not sure when or if those were sent, but it evidently did not get the attention of the electorate. There may need to be a requirement for more extensive notification. It may be that we need to require multiple mailings and a notice of disposition card with the new polling location shown, with the first notice at least 30 days prior to the election. In Douglas County, a letter, postcard, and notice of disposition are all three sent prior to the election when a polling location is changed. There should be a minimum requirement statewide to be consistent.

I would be glad to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Submitted by:

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