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Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber in opposition to SB 37, Regarding the documentary proof of citizenship requirement for voting

Good morning Madame Chair, members of the committee. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am the Executive Director of Kansas Interfaith Action. We are a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social and economic justice issues. I am here today in opposition to SB 37.

KIFA is appearing at this hearing because people of faith consider the right to vote to be an issue of justice, and because the mainline Christian, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist denominations have made clear that the protection and expansion of voting rights are moral issues.

A representative example is an oped written by Patrick Carolan of Franciscan Action Network, and Miles Rapoport:

[America's] social bonds were formed, in part, by a broad spectrum of faith traditions dating back more than 200 years in America. They derive from teachings that recognize each person as a gift of a Creator and emphasize the essential human dignity of every person. We believe firmly that human dignity includes the right to vote in our elections and the right to speak and to be heard. Every person, our shared teachings tell us, should have a voice and a vote on the policies impacting their family's future. The democratic process was founded on the concept that the best solutions come from the marketplace of ideas where everyone can contribute. But these contributions can be nearly meaningless when drowned out by immoral policies.¹

Since 2010, Kansas has passed a number of laws that make voting more difficult. These laws were promulgated by the Secretary of State with the argument that they would protect against vote fraud, particularly by undocumented immigrants. Well, here we are 7 years later, and we know now that voting fraud is virtually non-existent. And it's not for lack of looking: the Secretary of State was given prosecutorial powers over cases of voter fraud, but so far all he's been able to come up with is a couple of elderly Republicans registered to vote in two states.

But while voter fraud is virtually non-existent, these laws have effectively disenfranchised thousands of Kansans, particularly the elderly, people of color, and people with low-incomes. That's what makes this a justice issue, and of concern to the faith community my organization represents.

In the case of the documentary citizenship requirement, the subject of the current bill, a federal court has already ruled that it is a “mass denial of a fundamental constitutional right.” But instead of accepting the court's decision, the secretary wants you to codify this injustice into law. Passing this law would immediately disenfranchise 18,000 Kansans – not undocumented immigrants, but *Kansans* trying to exercise their

constitutional, I would argue sacred, right to help decide on their – our – leaders. All to address a problem that doesn't exist.

Madame Chairman, members of the committee, the time has come to say, enough. This body has been too willing over the past several years to tolerate, even enable the secretary's wild goose chases. But his obsession has real consequences for real Kansans. And the time has come for this legislature, this committee, to say, no more.

This legislature must say, finally, to this secretary that his job description is to facilitate participation in our democratic process, not to stifle it. You can do by stopping SC 37 right here, in this committee. I urge you to do just that.

Thank you.

[1](http://billmoyers.com/story/what-religion-has-to-do-with-campaign-finance-and-voting-rights)What Religion Has to Do With Campaign Finance and Voting Rights, <http://billmoyers.com/story/what-religion-has-to-do-with-campaign-finance-and-voting-rights>