

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 37

Presented to the Senate Ethics, Elections and Local Government Committee

Davis Hammet
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Chair Bowers, Members of the Committee,

I spend hundreds of hours on voter registration. The SAFE act requirement of proof of citizenship created an absurd burden in this basic civic responsibility. When courts struck down the proof of citizenship component of the SAFE act and struck down Secretary of State Kris Kobach's attempt to circumvent the legislature in establishing a two tiered system, it returned the original level of burden in voter registration that is more manageable. Upon these court decisions, I immediately began using the federal voter registration form in all of our registration efforts.

The requirement of proof of citizenship only applies to first time registrants. One must ask: if this is so important why doesn't it apply to every single registrant? The answer is obvious: It would disenfranchise voters and decimate participation in elections, which is exactly what it is doing to young voters. How the system is set up under the SAFE act has the greatest impact on young voters. The highest rate of registration without submitted proof of citizenship (referred to as 'suspense') is concentrated around colleges and universities with University of Kansas containing the highest rate. We can't know the exact numbers because the Secretary of State was purging 'suspense' registrants every 90 days before a court order.

Before the court orders allowing the use of the federal form, I contacted hundreds of Kansans on the 'suspense' list to explain the need to submit proof of citizenship. Many people hang up assuming you are a scammer because asking for such documents to register to vote seems absurd. Others explain how ridiculous that is and how they'd rather not vote then. Occasionally, I was able to get someone to follow through.

One case that highlights issues with this system is a young woman at Washburn University. I called her to explain the need to submit proof of citizenship. She knew she needed to, but having moved here from California did not have any proof of citizenship. She had sought out a birth certificate, but because Google produced hundreds of results she didn't know what website was real and gave up. Over the course of several days I helped her find the sole place

that she could request a certified birth certificate. She then had to pay for a notary and mail a notarized form and a check for \$30 to request the birth certificate. Over a month later I had to again make contact and instruct her how to get proof of citizenship to the county clerk. Just for this young woman to participate in elections it took several days of tracking, over \$30, and a nonprofit having to act as a case worker.

The forthcoming Briefing Report of the Kansas Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, currently in draft form, lays out many of these concerns in detail. The young woman's case above illustrates what appears to be an unconstitutional poll tax under the 14th and 24th amendments. Multiple errors at the Secretary of State's office has resulted in thousands of voter registrations being lost. There is academic consensus that stricter voting requirements result in lower voter turnout. There is a glaring lack of any data suggesting the need for such strict voter restrictions. These are, but a few of the findings and I recommend the committee members read the draft briefing in entirety.

I personally have registered over half a thousand young Kansans using the federal voter registration form. All of those registrants will immediately be disenfranchised in state and local elections if Senate Bill 37 is passed.

We are in a time when Kansas's population is diminishing. Participating and engaging in state and local elections increases the bond young citizens have with their communities. The system of proof of citizenship requirements solely for first time registrants is a breaking of the opportunity to bond citizens through elections.

This bill snubs young Kansans and diminishes the avenues of peaceful change in our state. Every vote denied is a step toward your elected post becoming illegitimate. We are in an era of great apathy among young voters and devoiding them of civic power in local and state elections is an irresponsible if not immoral and dangerous path.

Please do not advance this bill that disproportionately disenfranchises my generation. For the love of nonviolence and democracy, vote against SB 37.

With conviction,

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