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STATE OF KANSAS

Senate Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government

Testimony on SB 229

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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 229. SB 229, if passed, would change who appoints an election commissioner in counties over 130,000 people. Current law requires the secretary of state's office to make that appointment. This bill would require the county commission to make that appointment. The Secretary of State's office is opposed to this bill.

It is the belief of the Kansas Secretary of State's office that the current law, which has been in effect in some form since 1947, currently serves the taxpayers of Kansas well. There are currently four election commissioners in Kansas. Election commissioners are not subject to the politics that occur in county courthouses. Each of these offices are professionally managed offices that are largely free from political influence. Although, it is not practical to completely remove political influence from the administration of elections. The current process used for the appointment of election commissioners maintains as much distance as possible from political influence.

Local government officials are allowed input into the process. When a new election commissioner is appointed, the secretary of state's office routinely works with local officials in finding and vetting applicants for the job. Although the final appointment is made by the Secretary of State, local county commissioners, and other officials, often serve on an appointment committee to narrow the field of applicants and provide input on the finalists.

Election commissioners in Kansas are award winning members in their field. The four election commissioners and their offices have won many awards at the national level for efficiencies and improvements in election administration. Most recently, the four commissioners collaboratively won an award for releasing a combined RFP for voting equipment that saved each county hundreds of thousands of dollars. The four commissioners routinely use their knowledge and expertise in providing assistance to other county election offices with issues that may arise. This is done with the urging and facilitation of the secretary of state's office. I do not believe any of that would happen if appointment authority was moved to four distinct offices with four distinct viewpoints, instead of one.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony against this bill, and I stand for any questions.