



**PO Box 654
Lawrence, KS 66044
KansasInterfaithAction.org
Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
Rev. Sarah Oglesby-Dunegan, Board Chair**

**Written Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
in Support of SB 351, Provisional Ballots
Senate Ethics, Elections and Local Government Committee, Sen. Elaine Bowers, chair**

Mme. Chair, Ranking Member Haley, members of the committee –

Kansas Interfaith Action is a statewide, multi-faith issue advocacy organization that educates, engages and advocates on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social, economic, and climate justice issues. We represent 2,000 people of faith (mostly Mainline Protestant, moderate Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Unitarian Universalist) in Kansas, and are the state public policy office of the ELCA Lutheran Church. Our goal is to bring a moral voice to public policy in Kansas.

KIFA is a member of the Kansas Coalition for Citizen Participation, because we consider voting rights a core justice issue. As communities of faith, our concern is making sure that our friends and neighbors have what they need to survive and thrive. The best way for people to organize for their own needs is through elections, and to do so requires the most robust voter eligibility possible, and the most inclusive counting of votes. This is especially important for poor people, people of color and others who don't have money or other means to access political decisionmakers. In a recent statement the United Church of Christ said: "Voting is at the heart of the democratic process. It is the most fundamental access point for individuals to engage in the public dialogue and have a voice in the public policy decision-making process that can shape the future of our local, regional, national and global collective life."

One of the most important gaps in voter participation in Kansas right now is in the area of provisional ballots. People might have to vote via provisional ballot for reasons that are beyond their control, such as a recent move or even a clerical error. They think in good faith that these votes will count, but roughly 80% of the provisional ballots rejected in 2018 did not count simply because of a loophole in the current law that forces counties to not count these votes. SB351 would amend the law so that election officials count these provisional ballots after confirming a voter's eligibility, just like they already do for several categories of voters. In other words, after being verified through our current election security measures, the presumption would be that the voter is eligible, as opposed to now, where the presumption is that the vote will be discarded.

The changes envisioned by SB 351 would not change the way election workers do their job, or add any requirements to the county election offices. The only change would be counting votes cast by eligible voters that are currently rejected.

We urge you to recommend SB 351 favorably for passage to the full Senate. Thank you for your attention.