



CLERK'S OFFICE

Rich Vargo, MCC
County Clerk
110 Courthouse Plaza
Manhattan, Kansas 66502-0109
Phone: 785-537-6300
Fax: 785-537-6394
E-mail: rvargo@rileycountyks.gov

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government
February 20, 2020**

I am Rich Vargo, Riley County Clerk and Election Official—a position I have held since elected in 1996. I thank you for the opportunity to present information in support of SB 412, relating to permanent advance voting status.

Effective Date of Senate Bill 412

Senate Bill 412 proposal, if passed, effective date would be July 1, 2020 could not come at a better time. Presidential elections are by far the most challenging election to administer due to the increased voter participation. Advanced voting was passed by the Kansas Legislature in 1994 and first implemented in a statewide election in 1996. Advance voting in person has not increased voter participation it has only made it more convenient by offering more times to vote. Advance voting has not significantly reduced polling place lines during high participation times on election day. In the 2000 election, election officials across the nation—including Kansas—were criticized due to long lines during the presidential election. To help reduce the problem, specifically with high turnout elections, many election officials across the state have been mailing advance voting by mail applications to all registered voters. The result has been great participation by mail and favorable comments on the convenience to the voter.

Riley County's Experience

On the November 8, 2016 Presidential Election, Riley County did not send an advance by mail application to every registered voter. Riley County received 1,304 advance by mail ballots for the November 8, 2016 Presidential Election which had a 65% total voter turnout. On the November 6, 2018 State General Election, Riley County did mail an advance by mail application to every registered voter. Riley County received 3,272 advance by mail ballots for the November 6, 2018 State Election which had a 56% voter turnout. You can see these numbers clearly show the significant impact on reducing pressure at the polls and increasing voter turnout by making voting more convenient for our constituents.

Security of Mail Ballots

Many states have been conducting secure all mail ballot elections for over three decades. The State of Kansas approves of ballots by mail for special elections and through permanent advance by mail application and by requiring all other constituents to fill out an application for each and every election they wish to participate by mail. Kansas has a secure method to mail and receive ballots by mail. In Kansas, election officials verify the signature on the advance by mail ballot envelope matches the registered voter signature on their voter registration card. In 2016, prior to Riley County sending out the application to vote by mail to all registered voters, I hired a Certified Signature Verification Trainer to train all of our staff and other Kansas Election Officials in how to properly verify signatures.

County Expense

The cost would not increase because there would be a direct correlation in the reduction of poll workers needed to offset the cost of increased mailing cost. Cost neutral, with the goal being accomplished of significantly increasing voter participation in all elections.

In 24 years of election administration I have seen many attempts by the federal and state government to make elections more convenient for all voters and to help increase participation with honestly little impact. The expansion of the eligibility requirements for permanent advance voting status is a no cost change which would have a direct positive impact on voter turnout for all elections.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 412, and I ask you to vote in favor of the bill.

Sincerely,



Rich Vargo
Riley County Clerk and Election Official