

January 31, 2023

House Committee on Elections
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to House Bill 2053 – authorizing the Secretary of State to adopt rules and regulations for the use of remote ballot boxes.

Chair Proctor and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in opposition to House Bill 2053. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful and health communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. We oppose this legislation as it would grant the Secretary of State (SoS) unfettered authority to control remote ballot boxes, which may significantly and adversely impact the administration of elections. Voting rights are an important social driver of health, as recently determined by the American Medical Association because voting allows people to elect to office representatives that represent their health and other interests. According to the Health and Democracy Index, the more inclusive and expansive voting access is, the better the health outcomes are for a state.

According to the National Association of Counties, any changes to elections law without supporting resources can harm the elections process at the county level. The broad regulatory authority given to the SoS in HB 2053 could have this effect. HB 2053 could lead to confusion and barriers to voting given its lack of specificity and provides little to no direction for the SoS to promulgate rules.

Additionally, HB 2053 does not follow some of the best practices and decision points outlined in the National Conference of State Legislature's reporting on voting outside the polling place. Specifically, NCSL specifically identifies the need for a variety of options to return ballots, including drop boxes. That sort of specificity regarding what has worked in other states to protect voter access could and should be included in a bill addressing ballot box access. Conversely, HB 2053 as currently written gives the SoS the unlimited discretion to potentially limit opportunities for voters to access ballot boxes, for example, the opportunity for voters to correct their mailing address and verification.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote no on HB 2053 due to its lack of specificity, or to amend the bill to add greater specificity consistent with NCSL and other best practices for protecting voter access. Absent some specificity or direction, the bill is susceptible to abuse and could result in an infringement on voting rights.



**OUR
PURPOSE**

Every day we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.

We encourage the legislature to support ways to increase voter turnout and civic engagement in Kansas to empower citizens to participate more freely in the democratic process. Please feel free to contact me at nmadden@healthforward.org

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D.
Impact Strategist - Policy
Health Forward Foundation

