



Feb. 8, 2022

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

Re: Health Forward Foundation opposition to HB 2486 providing the use of electronic poll books in elections and the approval of such books by the secretary of state.

Chair Bergquist and members of the committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in opposition to requiring the use of electronic poll books in Kansas elections. Health Forward is committed to fair and just electoral processes that support and advance inclusive, powerful, and health communities. We recognize that cybersecurity in the election process is a top priority; however, we stand in opposition to legislation that jeopardizes the integrity of the democratic process itself and potentially restricts voter access and opportunity.

We have found that increased access to voting has a direct correlation to health outcomes. States with policies that make voting easier have been linked to greater civic participation. Additionally, studies have shown that an enhancement of one's access and opportunity to vote has a direct link to greater health outcomes and improved social economic status, particularly within communities of color. When the act of voting is more challenging, Kansans may not participate in the process – an outcome that is in opposition to the democratic ideals of Kansas and of the United States. Because of this connection, we believe that increased access to voting will ultimately be a key factor in narrowing the health disparity gaps we see in communities of color and rural communities in the state. A 2018 study found that 9% of eligible Black voters were turned away due to restrictive identification laws, compared to 3% of white Americans.

Kansans have engaged in civic participation by exercising their right to vote. The current process for-in person voting has allowed for such growth in voter turnout and should not be jeopardized for political gain. Data shows that while voter turnout was at a record high in 2020, states that implemented legislation making it harder to vote by restricting access and implementing more strict voting measures saw lower voter turnout than in previous years. Statistics show that despite historic voting numbers in the most recent election, 37% of eligible voters choose not to exercise their power to vote. Additionally, a recent poll found that greater than 30% of Black and brown people polled felt recent legislation was an attempt to suppress their vote.

Health Forward appreciates the Legislature's attention to this matter and we ask that you reject House Bill 2486. We would instead encourage the Legislature to pursue policies that increase voter turnout and civic engagement in Kansas and empower Kansans. Please feel free to contact me (jwilliams@healthforward.org) or Health Forward Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives McClain Bryant Macklin (mbryantmacklin@healthforward.org) with questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Williams", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jason Williams
Principal Impact Strategist - Power
Health Forward Foundation