

TESTIMONY OF
Gina Spade
IN OPPOSITION TO SB 37
KANSAS SENATE ETHICS, ELECTIONS, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 7, 2017

Thank you, Chair Bowers and Senators.

My name is Gina Spade. As a native Kansan and someone who has long encouraged citizen participation in our political process, I oppose Senate Bill 37.

No one can argue with the principle behind the bill – that is, that the right to vote in our elections is limited to U.S. citizens. In fact, that of course is already the law.

The right to vote is one of our most fundamental rights. Our country began with restrictions on this right – for African-Americans and for women. We have remedied those past injustices and more recently, the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18. The changes expanded the ability of Americans to have a voice in their government.

Unfortunately, the bill we are discussing here today would have the opposite effect. As the state court found, the proposed documentation requirements will certainly disenfranchise additional Kansans.

Kansas already places burdens upon the right to vote – you cannot register the same day as the election, absentee ballots are limited, and you must obtain and show a photo identification. In the most recent election, thousands of votes were set aside as “provisional” and it is unclear whether any of those votes were actually counted.

The bill’s two-tiered voting system would be even more confusing for would-be voters. Only two-thirds of registered voters participated in the past presidential election. Additional barriers are likely to reduce the number of voters even further.

Furthermore, the current process has sufficient deterrents in place to discourage non-citizens from attempting to vote. A person who falsely claims to be a U.S. citizen in order to register to vote is already subject to jail time or deportation. How do we know the deterrent is sufficient? Because we have no actual evidence that non-citizens are registering or attempting to vote in Kansas.

Instead of coming up with creative ways to keep people from voting, it should be the role of the Secretary of State to encourage more people to participate in our political process. For the above reasons, I urge the committee to reject this bill.