

Chair Eugene Sutton and members of Kansas House Elections Committee 2019

IN RE: Hearing on HB 2113 Petition requirements for recognition of political parties

2/12/19

RM 212-N

HB 2113 proposes to reduce the number of signatures required to gain official political party recognition from 2% of the number of voters in the preceding general election to 1%. Further, HB 2113 proposes to extend the allotted time to obtain the signatures from 180 days from the petition's inception to a full year from the petition's inception.

Respectfully, as the law stands, this year the required number of signatures would be over 20,000. If the number of signatures were reduced to 1%, this year, political parties would still have to obtain over 10,000 signatures to obtain official party status. 10,000 registered voters in Kansas providing the Secretary of State with a request for party recognition would be evidence of a compelling interest of the citizens. The requirement of over 20,000 signatures is a daunting requirement for any political party to be able to obtain official recognition. Under the current requirement, records show there has been no additional political party in Kansas since 1998. It is logical that an onerous petition signature requirement has impacted that low number, yet, as one considers that before 1965, Kansas law did not have a petition signature requirement at all and still there are only three recognized parties in Kansas - it is apparent that the required number of signatures does not have direct bearing on the politics of parties. Therefore, the larger number of required signatures is simply daunting.

There are not other petitions defined by our statutes that require as many signatures, however, all petitions are important to express the peoples' opinion. It is important to note that an independent candidate can gain access to the ballot with a requirement of only 5,000 signatures.

The number of required signatures should be a reasonable number to obtain. Neighboring states Colorado and Missouri require 10,000 signatures. Nebraska requires a number equal to 1% of the preceding general election vote, as HB 2113 proposes.

Finally, current Kansas law requires a political party to obtain 1% of the vote to retain official party recognition. To require that same party to obtain 2% of voter signatures before the party has official status to become recognizable to voters is illogically unfair.

The reason I endorse the proposed HB 2113 is to encourage people to vote. Voter records show the last general election turned out only 40% of registered Kansas voters and that was a high percentage in contrast to the trend in general voter turnout. Further, in the last general election, a number very near 50% of Kansas House Representative seats were uncontested elections. Arguably, we should do anything in our power to encourage more people to participate in our government.



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