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Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 2333, Advance Voting Ballot Applications House Elections Committee, Rep. Blake Carpenter, Chair

February 18, 2021

Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Miller, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber; I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social, economic and climate justice issues. We have been working to expand voting rights in Kansas for some years now.

In opposition to HB 2333, I want to reiterate three points that I have made in previous testimony before this committee: first, that our guiding principle in voting matters should be that **everyone who is eligible to vote in Kansas should be allowed and encouraged to vote**, without unnecessary legal or bureaucratic impediments; second, that the 2020 election was universally seen as being among the most successful in Kansas history, with record participation, quick results, and no appreciable trouble anywhere in the state; and third, that bills like this one are in response to a campaign of misinformation in the aftermath of the November election and therefore address a problem that has been proven -- categorically and conclusively -- not to exist.

The bill would prohibit anyone running for office from helping a voter fill out an advanced ballot application. As any candidate or party will tell you, advanced ballot applications are a regular part of voter outreach, and help improve participation. This overly broad law appears to include candidates for precinct committee, who are the retail workers of the political parties, arguably in closest touch with their neighbors. This legislation would prevent their acts of political engagement and outreach -- not of filling out other people's ballot, but of helping to fill out their ballot **application**. If there is evidence that fraudulent applications are being submitted, or that candidates or campaigns are unduly forcing people to fill out applications, I have not seen it. This bill is, again, a solution in search of a problem.

In addition, election officials in counties throughout the state can now take measures to help people correct mistakes or incompleteness on their advanced ballot applications. This is appropriate and promotes participation. This bill would prevent this simple and sensible action, as well as preventing election officials from even notifying the voter that the advanced ballot application was incomplete or incorrect. The result will be that people -- eligible voters -- will never know there was a problem until their advanced ballot doesn't show up in the mail. By then it might be too late, and the issue that prompted the advanced ballot application in the first place -- such as disability -- might preclude their ability to take part in the election at all. This bill would put unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles in the way of local election officials addressing the problem with a simple phone call.

Members of the committee, voting laws should help expand the right to vote, not constrict it. There is no call for this bill, and it would make things worse, and prevent Kansans from exercising their sacred right to vote. Please vote no on HB 2333.