

# Voter Services News

Wow! June 1 turned out to be quite a day. **It was the candidate filing deadline for municipal and school board elections that will be held August 3 (primary) and November 2 (general).** These local elections do not get as much attention as they deserve because the districts cover small portions of the county and campaigns are generally not very well funded. So, it is up to all of us to dig in and educate ourselves about the issues and the candidates and encourage our friends and neighbors to do likewise. Depending on where you live in the county, you will vote for municipal governing bodies – mayors and city council members and local school board members. See the list of candidates [here](#). Note that these races are non-partisan so candidates' party affiliation is not included on the candidate list.

The August primary election will be a short ballot. The only offices that attracted enough candidates to trigger a primary are Mayor of Topeka, Topeka City Council District 3 and Seaman USD 345 School Board position A4 – all noted on the candidate list linked above. **All voters in Topeka vote for Mayor**, so robust city-wide turn out in both the primary and the general elections will be important for a representative outcome. Topekans can find their City Council district on the map [here](#). Residents in the Seaman School District can see the district map [here](#).

## Why Local Elections Are Important

Just a few items from recent Topeka City Council agendas serve as examples. The Council:

- sets the City budget, which determines the city's portion of the property tax,
- establishes city sales tax within limits set by state law,
- establishes zoning and other land-use rules impacting development and redevelopment within the city,
- hires the City Manager,
- and establishes policy for city operation through the City Manager, which includes:
  - Water Department,
  - Fire Department,
  - Police Department,
  - Public Works Department,
  - and Municipal Court, among others – all of which can and do impact the daily lives of city residents.

The Mayor and City Council have an impact in other arenas, too. Washburn University and its students, faculty and staff have an interest in municipal elections since the Mayor of Topeka serves on the Washburn Board of Regents and appoints three other Regents (for four of the nine-member Board). In addition, all City Council members, along with the County Commissioners, are members of the Topeka/Shawnee County Joint Economic Development Organization (JEDO) with the Topeka Mayor, Deputy Mayor and two Council members serving as voting members. JEDO allocates tax revenue to businesses to encourage economic development. Other city councils in the County deal with matters of equal importance to residents of their cities.

Finally, as we have seen over the past year+, local School Boards face challenges at each meeting that directly impact the education, health and wellbeing of our children. We urge you to take all municipal and school board elections very seriously.

We updated [LWVTSC.org](http://LWVTSC.org) to help you with your pre-election research. Check back often to find more information. Follow [LWVTSC](#) on Facebook to stay in the know about League activities and other information.

## Voter Suppression

Also on June 1, the League of Women Voters of Kansas joined with three community partners, Loud Light, Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, and Topeka Independent Living Resource Center, to challenge in state court two bills enacted by the 2021 Legislature that, if allowed to go into effect, will hamper the voter services work of the League.

The bill that directly impacts the League's voter education efforts this summer and fall, HB 2183, takes effect July 1 during the election cycle and slightly over a month ahead of the August primary. The uncertainty caused by the enactment of that bill has already hampered the League's effort to educate and register voters – an effort that is especially important for local elections. We encourage you to closely follow the unfolding of the litigation. For those of you who want a quick version of the issues, here we go:

- Two bills are challenged, [HB 2183](#) (effective July 1, 2021) and [HB 2332](#) (effective Jan. 1, 2022). Both were vetoed by Governor Kelly. The vetoes were overridden by the Legislature. As outlined in the League's press [release](#) about the suit the challenge centers on the bills':
  1. **Voter Education Restriction:** It is now considered a crime to “give the appearance of being an election official.” This “false representation” provision would chill the free speech activities of organizations like the League of Women Voters of Kansas, Loud Light, Kansas Appleseed, the Topeka Independent Living Resource Center and numerous other churches, community organizations and concerned citizens who work to ensure every Kansan knows how to safely and effectively cast their ballot.
  2. **Advocacy Ban:** The distribution of applications to vote an advance ballot is now prohibited if materials are mailed from outside the state. This provision hinders the legitimate advocacy efforts of organizations working to get out the vote.
  3. **Signature Rejection Requirement:** The new mandated signature-match regime could lead to the disqualification of a significant number of ballots each election based on the opinion of untrained election workers working without any legal standard to guide them.
  4. **Delivery Assistance Ban:** Kansans are no longer permitted to assist in the collection of 10 or more advance ballots, disproportionately harming Kansans with disabilities, rural Kansans and those living on tribal lands.

If you are interested in the details of the complaint, you can find a copy [here](#).

LWVK issued the following update on June 17: “Today, we joined with the other plaintiffs in filing a motion for a temporary injunction against the "Voter Education Restriction" in HB 2183.

This is the portion of the bill that makes it a crime to engage in activity that gives the appearance of impersonating an election official. As you know, this provision was one of our main concerns about the recently-passed legislation as it could directly affect the work our Leagues do. The filing takes place two weeks before the bill becomes law on July 1, so the next couple weeks could be busy! You can read the full press release on our website [here](#).”

**In addition to the suit filed in state court, two groups, VoteAmerica and the Voter Participation Center, challenged HB 2332 in federal court.** You can read that complaint [here](#). The organizations that filed the suit sent thousands of Kansans advance ballot applications, making it easier to request a ballot by eliminating the preliminary step of requesting an application from the local election office. In Shawnee County and in counties across the state that convenience may have helped increase 2020 election participation in a safe manner during the pandemic. As stated in the complaint, “HB 2332 prohibits [the organizations] from employing their most effective means of persuading voters to engage in the democratic process: mailing advance mail ballot applications to registered Kansas voters, complete with a pre-addressed return envelope, and personalizing those applications by prefilling the individual’s name and address information.”

## **Federal Legislation to Protect Voting Rights**

***For the People Act.*** While we’re talking about voting rights and access, we encourage you to take a look at the *For the People Act* ([HR 1](#) as passed by the U.S. House and [S1](#) in the U.S. Senate). The bill is currently under consideration in the Senate. “The *For the People Act* is the most expansive democracy reform legislation we have seen since the *Voting Rights Act*,” said Virginia Kase, CEO of the League of Women Voters. “This bill will protect voting rights, eliminate dark money in our elections, restore transparency and accountability in our government, and curb partisan and racial gerrymandering once and for all.” (See the full press [release](#).)

The *For the People Act* is a fair representation bill. This legislation will put power back into the hands of American voters by making voting easier and more accessible and by modernizing future elections. Over the last two years, the bill was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, but stalled in the Senate. The *For the People Act* addresses some of the most pressing issues facing our democracy by:

- Restoring the *Voting Rights Act*
- Modernizing our voter registration system
- Restoring voting rights to formerly-incarcerated people
- Curbing partisan gerrymandering
- Making campaign contributions more transparent

Check out the annotated guide to the bill prepared by the [Brennan Center](#).

Stay safe and well,  
Mary Galligan and Jeanne Vawter, Co-Chairs  
Voter Services