



**TESTIMONY
CSSB 1310
House Committee on Elections
May 12, 2009**

The League of Women Voters of Texas has a long history of working to increase voter participation in Texas and supporting laws that would make it easier for Texans to vote.

We offer testimony about CSSB 1310. You may have noted that we offered written testimony in support of SB 1310 because we thought it was a continuation of the pilot. Since that time we've worked with Urban Counties and other advocacy groups to improve the bill significantly. After that work, we still feel we can support CSSB 1310 only as a pilot program that would permit the Secretary of State to gather more data about potential issues that may arise using countywide polling places. After the S.O.S. has gathered more data the Legislature could make an informed decision about what safeguards are necessary and if reductions in the number of polling places can take place without undue hardship on voters or reductions in turnout.

In principal we believe there are significant gains to be made with identifying at least a few countywide polling places.

1. Persons who find it convenient to vote nearer where they work may vote at any countywide polling place.
2. Countywide polling places will require better trained poll workers whose skill will improve the whole voting experience.
3. Significant attention can be played, in site selection, to public transportation availability and accessibility to the disabled. Lubbock publicized that they had someone skilled at sign language at one of their countywide locations. This effort was well received by those needing this assistance.
4. Some precincts just don't have a good, affordable and accessible location for voting.
5. Over the long term, costs for counties may be reduced.

The areas we have concerns about are:

1. Recent news reports on US Supreme Court hearings on a case here in Travis County suggest that there is a high potential for Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act to be overturned this June. This law has been the backbone of election law in the South for many years as it has protected us from discrimination and overtly partisan decisions about voting locations. Texas will have to be more diligent in protecting citizens from discrimination and partisan decisions. We need more evidence that the protections in CSSB 1310 are adequate.
2. This bill is likely to impact negatively voters in rural areas more than in more dense areas because it may put the nearest polling place significantly further away.
3. People who have been voting at the same location for years expect that to continue and may not find out about changes until too late to make transportation arrangements.
4. Some people only feel safe voting in their own community.
5. Counties may make imprudent decisions about which polling places to eliminate. These decisions may negatively affect minority and older voters.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.