

May 27, 2026

Dear Commissioner Schmidt,

Thank you for meeting with me last week to discuss the Election Office's plan for the 2026 election, which I first learned about from your office earlier this month.

I am writing to express concern regarding the Johnson County Election Office's decision to reduce early voting sites for the 2026 election cycle. While I appreciate that your plan includes new early voting locations in Spring Hill and De Soto, this plan eliminates eight early voting sites that were available during the 2024 election cycle, reducing the countywide network from 18 to 12 sites. These changes were made without consultation with the Board of County Commissioners despite the BOCC allocating full funding in 2025 to support the established slate of locations for 2026. A decision of this magnitude, potentially affecting how more than 460,000 registered voters access early voting, should occur only through a transparent, data-driven process with meaningful engagement of the elected body responsible for funding and accountable for service quality. Perhaps even more importantly, the decision was made without engagement with the general public who frequent early voting locations in Johnson County.

Based on the memo you sent to the Board of County Commissioners this month, the following locations that were early voting sites in 2024 are not planned for the 2026 election cycle:

- Central Resource Library
- Oak Park Library
- Leawood City Hall
- Tomahawk Ridge Community Center
- Johnson County Community College Midwest Trust Center
- Westwood City Hall
- Olathe Downtown Library
- Johnson County Sunset Offices

Several of the eliminated locations served dense population areas and key community hubs, including downtown Olathe which now has zero early voting locations, north Overland Park with the closure of Central Resource and Oak Park Library, and Johnson County Community College whose students and faculty will lose on-campus early voting. While two new sites in De Soto and Spring Hill expand geographic coverage in the south and west, thousands of voters will lose familiar locations, an especially significant change for voters who rely on consistency and proximity in their voting routine.

The BOCC has seen no analysis regarding potential increased wait times at any locations - including the Arts and Heritage Center, which is the County's highest-volume site and now one of only three sites serving all of Overland Park. We have not seen the metrics that drove the Election Office's decision-making process or how success of the reduced-site model will be measured in August and November 2026. We have not seen an analysis regarding voting patterns as they relate to employment or educational hubs in the County.

Your memo stated that the goal was to establish equal access to early voting across the county and to standardize the days and hours of operations. I'm concerned that the critical factors of population concentration and voter density were not given adequate consideration in the site selection. The 2024 results show 59% of voters chose early in-person. The 2026 Budget provides resources to meet that need. I would be happy to consider funding requests to add locations to expand early voting sites while preserving existing access, both for this election cycle and within the 2027 budget.

I appreciate our shared commitment to fiscally responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars. However, such prudence needs to be balanced against the potentially negative impacts to Johnson County residents. Scaling back early voting locations potentially disenfranchises those who rely on the accessibility and convenience of our budgeted early voting sites.

The 2026 Johnson County Community Survey makes clear how strongly residents value access to advance voting. Convenient, accessible polling places (**93 percent agreement**) and adequate advance voting locations (**87 percent agreement**) are the two highest-rated perceptions of service delivery in the entire survey, outranking every other county service attribute.

Residents also identified the Johnson County Election Office as the second most important service the county provides, behind only emergency medical and ambulance services. Notably, the share of residents who named convenient polling places as a top-three priority has risen from 12 percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2025 to 20 percent in 2026. Residents are placing more importance on access to voting, not less, and reducing sites runs in the opposite direction of clearly expressed public sentiment.

Voter behavior tells the same story. In the 2016 general election, 135,782 Johnson County voters cast their ballot early in person. By the 2024 general election, that number had grown to 204,865 - or 60% of all voters - more than the combined total of voters who cast ballots by mail and on Election Day in 2024. Early in-person voting is no longer a peripheral option in Johnson County. It is how the majority of voters now participate, and demand has grown by more than 50 percent across two presidential cycles. In 2026, we can expect high voter turnout due to a constitutional amendment, primaries for both parties' gubernatorial, US Senate, and US House of Representatives candidates on the August primary ballot.

I'm concerned about how these changes will impact public trust in our elections system, especially in a critical year where local, federal and state, and constitutional amendments are on the ballot.

I respectfully ask for clarity on whether the affected locations can be restored in time for the 2026 primary election, and for your assurance that the full suite of early voting sites will be in place for the 2026 general election. Protecting convenient, accessible advance voting in Johnson County is our shared desire, and I look forward to working together toward that end.

Sincerely,

Mike Kelly
Chairman, Johnson County Board of County Commissioners