

Oral Testimony

U.S House of Representatives

Committee on House Administration

Thursday, February 14th

Alejandro Rangel-Lopez

Dodge City High School (KS) Student

Thank you, Congresswoman Lofgren and members of the committee, for this opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Alejandro Rangel-Lopez and I am a senior at Dodge City High School in Dodge City, Kansas. I serve as the Student Council President, National Honor Society Vice President, participated in policy debate for four years, and was recently chosen as an alternate to represent Kansas for the US Senate Youth Program. My parents are immigrants from the states of Guerrero and Veracruz respectively and they came to the United States for the same reason everyone else did and continues to do so – to reach for a dream that isn't attainable where they're from. That dream led them to the city I now call home, to work in the two beef packing plants that fuel Southwest Kansas' economy. Our story isn't unique. Thousands of people from every corner of the world have arrived in Dodge City to forge their own path and to create a better future for their children. Being a first-generation Mexican-American, I've experienced precisely what that means. I celebrated Dia De Los Muertos, grew up with the traditions my parents instilled in me while also learning English in preschool and studying the origin of this great

nation. I sang the Kansas state song, “Home on the Range” on Kansas Day, and over many years, came to the conclusion that nothing beats a Kansas sunset.

But, I can’t say there haven’t been issues. Until a month ago, Dodge City only had one polling place for nearly 13,000 voters and while that’s bad enough to make it one of the most burdened polling places in our state, it was at the very least, centrally located, which can’t be said about the location chosen for the 2018 midterm elections. That new location was south of town, outside the city limits. Worse, the county clerk sent out the wrong location address to new voters. I fully expected to cast my first vote at the Civic Center, where I’d watched my dad vote every election year that I can remember. But this new site wasn’t accessible by public transportation before we raised concerns. We believed these factors would negatively impact minority and low-income voters. I could not sit idly by as it happened. For a long time, other community members had voiced concerns to the county clerk about having only one polling site, but their words fell on deaf ears. After multiple failed attempts to contact our clerk about finding a resolution before the election, I, along with the League of United Latin American Citizens, became plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging the clerk’s actions and asking for a resolution before midterms. While we were unsuccessful in finding relief for the midterms, it played a pivotal role in pushing her to open the two, new polling sites located inside the city limits.

We rely on our elected officials to make the right choices and for a county clerk, that job was to make voting as easy as possible in the county that she represents. Unfortunately, that’s not what happened. The clerk spent nearly \$100,000 of taxpayer money for legal fees fighting our efforts to make polling places more accessible.

This story is in not unique, either. People across the country from Georgia to North Dakota to Texas and to my home state are making it more difficult for citizens to vote rather than

expanding our democracy. We often think that the biggest threat to the American electoral system is a foreign threat. While those concerns are justified, it's also true that many of the measures undermining voter access are being perpetrated by the very elected officials elected or selected to protect people's voting rights.

When people vote, our democracy becomes stronger. That is why I support HR1. If we had the guidance of this legislation, where it is recommended that all polling places are accessible by public transit, then we could have avoided what happened in Dodge City. It is a significant step towards a more just system that solves a lot of the issues we see today. Kansan Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both."

I choose our principles, which I learned early in my journey to becoming a Kansan, guide us toward the stars through difficulties.

Thank you.