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Concerns on HB 507

The primary concern for House Bill 507 is that it could limit the public's ability to question election officials. This concern is primarily centered on its provisions aimed at protecting election officials from harassment, intimidation, or undue influence. These concerns arise from **Section 115.638** of the bill, which criminalizes actions such as threatening, harassing, or disseminating personal information about election officials or their families with the intent to intimidate or interfere with their duties. There are already laws on the books that offer protection from harassment and physical harm.

Key Concerns:

1. Chilling Effect on Public Oversight: We argue that the broad language in Section 115.638 could deter legitimate public scrutiny or criticism of election officials. For example, the prohibition against "*conduct reasonably calculated to harass or alarm*" could be interpreted to include robust questioning or challenges to election decisions, potentially discouraging civic engagement and accountability efforts.

2. Ambiguity in Definitions: Terms such as "*harass*," "*alarm*," and "*personal information*" are not clearly defined, leaving room for subjective interpretation. This ambiguity could lead to inconsistent enforcement and raise concerns about infringing on free speech rights.

3. Impact on Transparency: The bill's focus on protecting election officials may inadvertently reduce transparency by making it more difficult for the public to hold officials accountable for errors or misconduct without fear of legal repercussions.

4. Potential Overreach: While protecting election officials is important, some worry that these measures might overreach by criminalizing actions that are not genuinely harmful but perceived as critical or confrontational.

While the intent of HB 507 is to safeguard election officials from undue harm and intimidation (which is already illegal), this legislation is not only unnecessary but could also silence any criticism or questioning of our election process. Our elections must be open and transparent, and without the ability to question our election officials without the fear of criminal prosecution, it would be impossible for Missourians to have faith in the election process. ***We, therefore, are opposed to this legislation and urge representatives to reject HB 507.***