



Office of the Indiana Secretary of State

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Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson Remarks to the Committee on House Administration

October 25, 2017

Good morning Chairman Harper, Vice Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Brady, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I'm Connie Lawson, Indiana's Secretary of State and chief elections officer. I am also president of the bipartisan National Association of Secretaries of State.

I am honored to address you. Voter List Maintenance is needed because approximately 24 million – or, one out of every eight – voter registrations in the United States are no longer valid or are significantly inaccurate, according to a 2012 study by the Pew Center.¹

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 requires the removal of inaccurate voter registration records, but with multiple safeguards to protect voters. In most cases before a registration record may be cancelled, the record must be identified as showing an incorrect current address for the voter. Only after two federal elections have taken place (up to 4 years), and only if the voter has not confirmed during those four years that the record is in fact accurate, can the voter registration record be cancelled as required by this federal law.

Simple failure to vote never causes a registration record to be cancelled. Cancellation only occurs if the registration contains inaccurate information which indicates that the voter is no longer qualified to vote at that address.

Local election administrators in Indiana's counties, who are most familiar with their voters and communities, perform voter list maintenance daily by updating information on voters who have moved, died, or requested that their registration be cancelled. However, many counties do not have the money to do periodic and uniform mailings to their voters as required by federal law. Thus the State has taken the lead.

This process begins when the state mails all Indiana voters a postcard. Some are returned due to an "unknown or insufficient" address. The state mails these voters a second, forward-able postcard, asking the voter to provide us with updated information. If the voter responds, their county updates their information, and no further action is needed by that voter. If the voter does not respond to either mailing, the record is marked inactive. Once a record is marked inactive, it

¹ "Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient: Evidence That America's Voter Registration System Needs an Upgrade," *The Pew Center on the States*, accessed October 13, 2017, http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2012/pewupgradingvoterregistrationpdf.pdf

is not removed from the list unless the voter misses the next two federal elections or otherwise fails to confirm their address is in fact correct. The voter is still eligible to vote during this four year period. If the voter casts a ballot from that address during any election that period (primary, general or special), their record is automatically returned to active status.

In 2014, Indiana undertook voter list maintenance using this statewide mailing process. Inactive registrations remained on the rolls for 2014, 2015, and 2016. Records that were still inactive at the end of that period were cancelled in 2017. As of today, 481,235 voter registrations have been canceled through this process.

Voter List Maintenance reduces election costs. Counties with bloated voter rolls are forced to spend more money to purchase extra equipment, secure additional locations and pay for election workers.

Allowing invalid registrations to remain on the rolls distorts the reality of actual voter participation and turnout. In 2016, the official voter turnout in Indiana was 58% of all registered voters, despite a record number of voters turning out to vote. Yet it is estimated that, if the Voter List Maintenance conducted this year had taken place before the 2016 general election, Indiana's turnout would have been about 65% - among the best in the nation.²

Voter List Maintenance also boosts voter confidence in our election system. I often hear from poll workers and county officials that voters are disturbed by seeing the name of a deceased family member or neighbor still on the list, years after their death or moving away.

As I close, I want to address the uncertainty that clouds voter list maintenance across the country. In states that are attempting to comply with federal law, like Indiana, activists groups are suing to keep maintenance from being done. In states that are not participating, activists groups are suing to force the process. Performing Voter List Maintenance is the law according to the National Voter Registration Act. This law was a compromise that required voter registrations to be available at government offices such as the BMV and voter list maintenance to be performed. We enforce the registration portion of the law uniformly but not the voter list maintenance piece. I encourage Congress to clarify this expectation for the states and to uphold the compromise of the National Voter Registration Act, and I commend the efforts of state officials around the country who are continuing to work hard in the face of this uncertainty.

I know I am getting close to the 5 minute mark, so the last piece I want to include is that our office participates in the Interstate Crosscheck program to assist with voter list maintenance efforts. I am happy to explain how this works in Indiana if need be.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. With that, I will end my prepared remarks, and I am happy to take any questions.

² "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016," last modified May 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html>