

Written Testimony of  
Florida Secretary of State Cord Byrd  
Before the United States Committee on House Administration  
“American Confidence in Elections: Looking Ahead to the 2024 General Election”

Good morning, Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. When I was last with you in May, we discussed the impact of federal law on the states’ ability to conduct voter roll list maintenance. With the November general election rapidly approaching, today I will discuss Florida’s ongoing efforts in the areas of election preparation, election observation, and contingency planning.

Elections administration, when properly conducted, is a 24-7-365-days-a-year job. Not only during an election year, but in off-election years as well. Since I testified before you two months ago, Florida has taken considerable steps to further ensure the integrity and transparency of our elections.

Clean elections begin with clean voter rolls. Florida had approximately 13.5 million active registered voters. That number changes every minute of every day — a person turns 18, a person passes away, a person moves into the state, a person moves out of state, a person becomes a U.S. citizen and registers to vote for the first time, a person becomes a felon, or a person has his or her voting rights restored.

To that end, since 2022, Florida has either removed or moved to inactive status one million voters. The ability to promptly and accurately maintain clean voter rolls is part of the legislative reforms championed by Governor DeSantis. Properly maintained voter rolls are essential to building confidence in the outcome of an election.

Rulemaking allows the Department to respond to issues as they arise when the Legislature is not in session. For example, one new rule increases reporting requirements for voter registration agencies. Specifically, any such agency that obtains information that an individual receiving government services is not a U.S. citizen must provide that information to the Department of State to be compared against the voter roll.

To ensure ballots are adjudicated uniformly the same across all sixty-seven counties, the Department has updated its polling place procedures to provide for uniform statewide operations of polling places. The procedures also include direction to Supervisors of Elections to ensure that spoiled ballots at polling places cannot be counted.

Finally, the Department updated its statewide rule on voter intent – creating a newly formatted mandatory handbook for county canvassing boards to use when making voter intent determinations during vote-by-mail canvassing and recounts.

Voting system uniformity is another key to Florida’s success. Some states allow local election officials to procure voting systems. We believe this is the wrong approach. In Florida, no voting system can be used in any election unless it has first been tested and certified by the State. The rigorous testing we conduct gives us the ability to eliminate problems before ballots are cast. Chain of custody of voting systems is applied to hardware and software. When voting system issues arise in other states, the

Department proactively contacts the vendor to determine the root of the issue and then verify that the problem cannot impact Florida's systems.

While we make every effort to minimize human error in elections, Mother Nature also sometimes has a say. As it happens, the typical election season coincides with hurricane season in Florida and other coastal states. We do not move or delay elections. As such, it is imperative that we maintain robust emergency plans. Storms, fires, floods, electrical outages, blocked roads – it all happens; Florida is prepared for all contingencies.

My office works closely with Florida's 67 county Supervisors of Elections, and if emergencies do arise, we take necessary steps to ensure that voters can vote. For example, during the 2022 election cycle, Florida had two severe hurricanes hit different parts of the state. Counties lost polling locations, voters were displaced from their homes, infrastructure was severely diminished—and the election still went on.

I visited the affected counties to survey the damage. We saw first-hand the destruction and worked with the Supervisors of Elections in those counties to determine their needs. Governor DeSantis then issued Executive Orders to provide flexibility to Supervisors to establish additional voting sites, expand vote-by-mail options, and amend reporting requirements. It is encouraging to see people perform their civic duty to vote despite being displaced and impacted by devastating storms.

Another thing that Florida gets right is election transparency. There are no pizza boxes, and you don't need binoculars to view our elections. Every part of the process is open to the public, campaigns, and candidates. Florida election law grants access to the public to watch equipment testing, the canvassing of ballots, and signature verification, among other things. Since 2020, candidates and the parties are also entitled to reasonable access to review signatures on vote-by-mail ballots, observe ballot duplication, and make objections. We want and encourage the public to watch how their ballot becomes a vote. We allow and encourage election observation. Candidates and the parties can designate observers at each precinct, and we deploy our own team of in-house observers across the state. Our two newest elections offices in Palm Beach and Broward Counties are the national model for openness and transparency.

Vigilance is the price of liberty. Florida is vigilant because we continue to strengthen and hone our election code year after year. We do not sit idle waiting for bad things to happen in order to correct them. We cannot run the risk of becoming complacent.

As I said in my previous testimony, and it bears repeating, Florida is committed to ensuring that all eligible Floridians who want to vote have the opportunity to do so. However, we are equally committed to preventing election fraud and protecting the integrity of Florida's voter rolls.