



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
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**House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Election Assistance Commission Oversight Hearing**

**Chairman Benjamin Hovland
U.S. Election Assistance Commission
February 16, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Quigley, Ranking Member Womack, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Ben Hovland, Chairman of the United States Election Assistance Commission or EAC. I appreciate the Subcommittee's invitation to testify on the work of the EAC and the impact of election security and pandemic response grants provided by Congress to the states.

The story of election administration in 2020 should not be told without acknowledging the tremendous job that state and local election officials did to run their elections while facing unprecedented challenges. With a record of nearly 160 million Americans voting in the November general election in the middle of a global pandemic, the effort required to conduct this election was herculean, and the officials who managed this task deserve our thanks and praise.

While politics and aftermath of the November election have distracted many from how the election was run, I can unequivocally say that this was the best administered election that I have seen in my career. There are many reasons for this success story, but first and foremost is that the public servants that run elections in cities and counties across this country put their personal health on the line; and worked countless hours for their voters and our democracy.

Federal grant money also played an essential role in assisting election officials with some of the challenges they faced. Since 2018, Congress has appropriated \$805 million for election security. This has helped replace outdated and paperless voting machines; replace or harden statewide voter registration databases; create innovative new programs, like "cyber navigators,"

that address head-on some of the resource disparity challenges of our decentralized election system; and countless hours of training for staff to be on alert and prepare and respond to common attack vectors.

The critical impact of this funding, combined with the impressive efforts of state, local and federal partners, gave me complete confidence when joining the joint statement from the elections infrastructure government and sector coordinating executive committees that the “November 3rd election was the most secure in our nation’s history.”

Additionally, the \$400 million provided as part of the CARES Act in April of 2020 helped election officials address some of the additional costs associated with running both the largest mail or absentee ballot election most jurisdictions had ever experienced and making polling places as safe as possible for voters and election workers.

The EAC was proud of the work we did to distribute and administer these grants to the states and appreciate this committee’s trust in us to do the job. The recent funding increase to the EAC from Congress also increased our capacity to assist election officials during this challenging time.

From an all-time low operating budget of \$7.95 million in FY19, the increase in FY20 made for an exciting time at the EAC. We expanded the EAC workforce by hiring experts in important areas of our work, including numerous mission critical positions across departments. Throughout the 2020 primaries and general election, the EAC provided much-needed assistance to election officials. By chairing the elections infrastructure joint COVID-19 working group, we were able to leverage partnerships with state, local, and federal partners to quickly respond with guidance on the challenges presented by the pandemic.

We also developed new guidance, hosted public forums on pandemic-related concerns, and closely monitored innovative state preparations – encouraging election officials to share their successes and challenges. These efforts included dozens of educational videos and materials for election officials highlighting proven best practices, addressing specific concerns related to COVID-19, and the use of CARES Act funding.

Other new efforts included creating the EAC’s new Cyber Access and Security Program, which provided security training, best practices, and other assistance for election officials tasked with protecting critical election infrastructure. The EAC also established the first ever National Poll Worker Recruitment Day, galvanizing national recruitment efforts and alleviating concerns about a significant shortage in poll workers due to the pandemic.

While we acknowledge the successes of state and local officials to administer the 2020 election, it is also clear that there is much work to be done. If the 2020 election has taught us anything, it is that our democracy is precious – we must invest in it to make it stronger, and we must constantly seek to improve it. As the Election Infrastructure Sector-Specific Plan notes, a “government-wide approach to funding elections and election security is needed. Viewing the Subsector as an ‘infrastructure’ of our democracy is important to understanding the need for consistent investment and maintenance to ensure the system is strong.”

We appreciate your interest in the EAC’s ongoing efforts. With its limited resources, the EAC has helped assist state and local officials through this unprecedented time. But the job ahead requires the proper level of investment to ensure lasting success. The EAC is prepared to play an increased role in this pursuit, and we look forward to our continued partnership with the Subcommittee and with Congress.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.