



American Confidence in Elections: State Tools to Promote Voter Confidence

Written Testimony

Joseph Paul Gloria, CEO – Operations

Election Center, National Association of Election Officials

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Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about the critical issue of voter confidence. Confidence in elections is critical to the success of our democracy in the United States of America. Election officials need support from local, state, and federal government to ensure they have the funding, training, tools and equipment they need to be successful in an ever increasingly challenging environment. Today, election officials all throughout the country are being asked to develop their expertise across an ever-growing list of areas while being under the brightest of microscopes, administering elections with zero faults, and all while being responsible for the safety of their staff, families and themselves. In this landscape, it is our responsibility to provide them with what is necessary to develop opportunities for success. Doing so will pave the way for sustainable and increased confidence in election processes by all voters.

Current Environment

In recent years demands on election officials in the United States have increased exponentially. In addition to supporting elections in their jurisdictions both large and small, they must work to develop skills in dealing with media, responding to mis/disinformation, providing transparency in their processes, educating voters in election processes, and protecting their systems against cyber security attacks, to name a few. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) published a more detailed list of current election administration responsibilities, the Election Administrator Competencies Wheel, which I have attached as Appendix A.

Although many states have developed a strong structure of support by utilizing resources from the state chief election office in collaboration with state clerk associations, many states still need assistance in providing structure in this area to promote training and the professional development of their election officials. These trainings translate into higher confidence in the integrity of our election processes nationwide.

Often, the absence of a strong and sustainable professional organization structure is simply due to a lack of training or guidance in developing effective networks within a state. And more frequently, there is a lack of resources or staff, which prevents some states from developing this structure. We must work to make funding available at the local and state level to eliminate these barriers to improving training and tools for election officials.

Election Official Experience

Prior to my retirement in January of this year I supervised elections in Clark County, Nevada, as the appointed Registrar of Voters. During my over thirty-year career as an election official, the most challenging portion of my career came during the 2020 and 2022 election cycles. I am not alone in this assessment. In 2020, election officials across the nation rose to the numerous challenges that accompanied administering an election during the COVID pandemic. This forced us to quickly adjust our service to voters in order to give everyone equal access to the process of voting without putting voters in a position to expose themselves to the virus. In Clark County, this also required us to implement safety protocols in our in person voting locations and to deliver mail ballots to all voters in the primary and general elections. Prior to the 2020 general election the largest number of mail ballots received in Clark County, NV during an election was just over 45,000. This number increased tenfold, to over 450,000, in the 2020 general election. Pulling off this election successfully was a huge effort by thousands in Clark County alone, and our staff is to be commended successfully administering a safe and secure election.

Unfortunately, we – like many other election officials across the country - also faced many other challenges, including working to educate those who had been provided false information about our election administration processes, which led them to question the integrity of our processes and the legitimacy of our vote counts.

Although the pandemic had subsided in 2022, challenges stemming from the widespread distribution of false information about election officials and election administration continued. A silver lining from the 2020 election cycle is that we were able to learn from what we experienced by increasing transparency, providing outreach to voters in an effort to educate them on our well-developed processes - many of which were statutorily mandated processes -and purchasing equipment to increase the efficiency of our mail ballot processing. We welcomed those with questions about or concerns about our elections to be part of the process, whether as an observer or a poll worker, so they could learn about the myriad controls in place that protect the integrity of our elections.

We didn't do all of this work alone, we had great support from our local county commissioners, our Secretary of State's office, federal officials, including those at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA), and the EAC, several non-governmental groups, such as the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections, and the general public who took it upon themselves to become more familiar with what our office did to uphold the integrity of the election process.

And, in addition to the challenges above caused by the widespread distribution of false information about elections, my staff, poll workers, and I received threats of physical harm. Messages we received included threats to our safety and vulgar insults claiming we had stolen the election. We even faced armed protesters outside of our voting facility, some of whom brandished weapons a short distance from our front door and verbally accosted staff members as they entered and exited our facility. Despite these challenges we were able to successfully administer the election. Another challenge we were forced to deal with, more than in any other previous election, was the recruitment of poll-workers during the pandemic.

Election Center, National Association of Election Officials (Auburn University)

In my new position as the Chief Executive Officer for Operations with the Election Center, the national association of election officials, I work for an organization with over a 35-year history of supporting election official education, certification, and networking opportunities. We currently have over 1,600

member election officials throughout the United States, and have long been the leader in educating election professionals and providing the Certified Election/Registration Administrator (CERA) Certification. As a member of the Election Center since 2004 I attribute much of my success as an election administrator to the training and networking opportunities this organization provided me with over the years.

As a leader in the elections community, we work to collaborate with several organizations such as the EAC, CISA, National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), National Association of State Election Directors (NASSED), as well as other groups in the elections community to provide information and opportunities to election officials to further their professionalism in election administration. This work is critical to the future of elections, and we are working to make it more accessible to all election officials in the future.

We have begun work to expand opportunities for officials by adding classes at our conferences about how local and state election officials can develop in-state training programs, and how to create and sustain their own state associations of and for local election administrators. This is incredibly important work, which will equip and empower local election official organizations to provide state specific training, and encourage training through our certification program (CERA). What is missing in some cases are the resources and knowledge in how to build and maintain these state organizations. In the past two years we have seen an exodus from the profession – in some states a third, or even half of their election officials have left the work that they love and had dedicated their professional lives to. We continue to see headlines of entire election office's staff walking off the job. Election officials are exhausted, and many do not feel supported in the difficult work that they do. This loss of institutional knowledge intensifies the importance of strong training and education programs.

Conclusion

The Election Center stands ready to do its part as a leader in the community for providing training and networking opportunities for our election official members. We will continuously work to increase access to our organization and its benefits, while working to collaborate with other groups that share our goal of further professionalizing election administration through education and training. Election administrators want continued education and training to improve the efficiencies of their offices, to serve the voters in the most effective way, but access is not uniformly available due to the limitations I have outlined. This is why it is so important that local, state, and federal agencies work to properly fund and support election officials across the nation. Long-term and consistent funding needs to be a priority to allow those who wish to obtain training in their fields to do so, as well as the ability to purchase the tools necessary to efficiently conduct elections in all jurisdictions, which will result in increased confidence in our voting processes by all voters. Thank you.

APPENDIX A

