



COLORADO COUNTY CLERKS ASSOCIATION

August 3, 2022

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to talk about what I believe is one of the most pressing issues for our constitutional republic, the security and integrity of our elections.

My name is Matt Crane and I am the executive director of the Colorado County Clerks Association. I have worked in election administration for 22 years in Colorado, including serving five years as the elected Arapahoe County Clerk and Recorder. I also work on election integrity issues nationally. I have made the safe and accurate administration of our most sacred right to vote my life's work. I am also a conservative republican.

The Colorado County Clerks Association consists of 64 county clerks, including democratic, republican, and unaffiliated officials. Our counties range in size from 450,000 active voters to 700. Our aim as an association is to focus on the education and professional development of our members and to advance mutually agreed upon policy goals, such as accessible and secure elections.

I want to begin by saying that the topic we are discussing here today is not new in our nation's history. Far too often, when a candidate loses an election, the candidate and their supporters cry foul and question the system with no actual proof of anything nefarious. However, in my 22 years of work on elections, I have never seen these reckless claims happen on this scale and in the well-funded and coordinated way it is happening today.

In our current reality, it seems the facts no longer matter regardless of how much accurate information is presented. And now that political bad actors have seen the financial and political value of spreading mis and disinformation, the dissemination and amplification of that fraudulent information is only growing.

One of the outcomes of this unprecedented attack on our election systems is that it is radicalizing people in a way we haven't seen before. The deeply held belief among some that our elections are not secure nor accurate has manifested itself as harassment, doxing, and outright threats on the lives of some of our election administrators.

In a survey I conducted among our 64 county clerks late in 2021, about a quarter of them reported fortifying their offices in some way, whether that was the addition of tinted bullet proof glass, more security around office access doors or other enhancements. Many of these clerks received input about what to do from their county sheriff who was also investigating threats against them. More clerks in my state would also want to make further security enhancements but lack the financial resources to do so.

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These emerging and pervasive threats to election workers and the clerks that oversee that work are falling heaviest right now on Republican clerks. Many, if not all of them, have seen an uptick in everything from concerning emails to actual physical threats. In one well publicized case, we have even seen a county clerk taken in by the lies. In this case, currently under state indictment and ongoing federal investigation, Clerk Tina Peters violated her oath of office and provided internal images of her voting system to an unknown number of outside entities. Contrary to the narrative of some, this security breach has only increased the threat to our election systems and dramatically decreased the integrity of our elections. This breach has also led to an increase in the intimidation, harassment, and threats to other election officials in Colorado who, unlike the Mesa Clerk, have refused to violate the public trust and the law.

As we think about what we can do to keep our election workers safe, it's important to remember that a typical county clerk's office exists solely to serve the public. Deed recording, driver's licensing activities, voter registration. All of these activities require direct contact with the public at open counters. While clerks are doing all they can to ensure their staff stays safe, we cannot change the nature of the work they do for their communities.

In Colorado, we have committed ourselves to maintaining the open, transparent operation of our elections as well. Colorado has long been considered one of the best examples of secure voting in the country. We pride ourselves in having found the right balance between access – so all can exercise their right to vote – and security, so all can trust the outcome of that voting. But even in our exceptional state, developed over decades by state and local election officials from both political parties, we are feeling the impacts of an insistence on conspiracy over facts.

The leads me to the two primary asks I have for you today.

- The first request I have for you is that you take the federal funding that is currently available and make it easier for a local election official to learn about and easier for them to receive. The current system is not transparent about where funds are available nor are the funds easy to apply for. These grants should be allocated directly to local government election officials. Passing the funds through the states creates additional delays for counties to access these funds. It also may allow states to reallocate these funds from local jurisdictions.

In Colorado, Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Security Agency (CISA) regional staff have done an amazing job working with counties to conduct physical security assessments of election facilities. These assessments analyze facilities to help identify security vulnerabilities and provides recommendations regarding how to mitigate those vulnerabilities. These assessments are invaluable in helping election officials better understand the security risks they face in their specific facilities. But identifying issues does not solve them. Most of the clerks in my state have a report they can never hope to implement because they lack the resources to pay for recommended mitigations, as well as the resources to be constantly chasing and securing grants.



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- The second request is to you as elected officials. I urge your support of your election workers. This support can be shown in many ways. Take a tour of election facilities in your state. Call your local election official if you have a concern. Avoid amplifying unproven and/or false rhetoric. Our constitutional republic must rely on an election process free of politics. True freedom and liberty come from self-determination. A person's vote is a key pillar of self-determination. When people lie about our election processes, it negatively impacts voter participation, as we saw in the 2021 Georgia Senate Runoff elections. This betrays our ideals of self-determination and of an active, engaged citizenry.

Americans throughout our country's history have fought and died for our sacred right to vote. We dishonor their memory when we allow politics and disinformation to undermine this process. If we don't make a commitment to stop fanning the flames of conspiracy for political gain, it will have implications that reach much farther than the next election cycle. And to be clear, this issue does not just belong to one political party. We have seen candidates from both major political parties refuse to accept defeat and harm our voting institutions. I urge you to stand with the 8,000 plus election officials across the county who are telling the truth, honoring their oaths of office, and serving their citizens by running accessible, transparent, and secure elections.

One of the biggest fallacies after the 2020 election is that election officials just look the other way and see no room for improvement. There is work that we must do to improve both the access and integrity of our elections. In Colorado, it is our local election officials leading the way. We are pushing for stronger evidence-based elections by improving the transparency and integrity of our processes. We have formed a committee of local, state and national election experts to further enhance how we audit our elections processes, including signature verification and voter registration. We are also pushing to make all ballot images and cast vote records available to the public at no cost after each election. We believe in secure and transparent elections. However, when lies so pollute our public discourse, it makes it extremely difficult for election experts to seek necessary improvements.

I want to close by thanking you for taking the time to carefully consider this issue. I believe it strikes at the very heart of the democracy we will have a decade from now. The decisions we make about that today and moving forward have real implications for our nation.