

**Testimony of Aaron Ammons  
Champaign County Clerk, Recorder of Deeds  
U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration  
November 1, 2023**

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Chairperson Klobuchar, Ranking Member Fischer and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this important hearing and for providing the opportunity for election officials to share our experiences of ongoing threats to election administration.

My name is Aaron Ammons, and I appreciate that our form of government affords me the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Champaign County, where I have served as the County Clerk and Recorder of Deeds since 2018.

I would like to speak to you with the knowledge and understanding of how elections work in America, so you can see more fully the status of our nation's election administration, and the threats we face as election officials and as a Nation. Never before has the imperative work of our nation's dedicated and diligent election officials faced such unrelenting pressure externally and internally. The protection of these critical workers should be of utmost importance to Congress as a whole, and the Rules Committee in particular because these are American citizens who run our early voting locations, process vote by mail (VBM) applications and ballots, as well as serve 12-14 hours on election day to ensure the United States has fair, free, and accessible elections.

The [Department of Homeland Security](#) has repeatedly warned that physical threats to election workers are of critical importance because those threats are a matter of national security. The 2020 election served as a potent demonstration of just how in danger our election workers are, and how little infrastructure is in place to protect us. During and after the 2020 election state and local elections officials received an influx of verbal, written, and physical threats. These [threats](#) varied from threatening hand written messages on VBM applications and voicemails from angry constituents threatening to "lynch" election workers, to suggestions of mass shootings of poll workers, specifically targeting their children as to send a more forceful message. Distinguished members of this committee, I submit to you that every single threat levied against election officials is a threat against our republic. However, even when such threats are investigated by

law enforcement officials, little action has resulted. Only about a dozen indictments have been issued against the perpetrators of these threats. We are told by State's Attorney's across the country that vile messages, while immoral and unfair, don't amount to actionable threats.

In addition, conspiracy theorists and election deniers have flooded election offices with dozens of bad faith freedom of information requests that absorb our administrative capacity which should be put to work helping eligible voters cast their ballots. While transparency and engagement with the public are core to the mission of all election officials, these requests are not intended to broaden public understanding or root out problems. They are the physical equivalent of denial of service attacks on a computer system, forcing election offices to devote scarce resources to responding to ever more esoteric questions that the filers actually have no interest in learning about. Election Authorities are always willing to share how elections work, however, we do not have the funds to mount the necessary rapid response campaigns needed to minimize the mis/disinformation saturating social media and other media platforms. This lack of a response allows organized lies to Trump disorganized truths.

Due to these mounting pressures, the [turnover](#) rate among elections officials has dramatically increased, resulting in a continued loss of institutional knowledge and it silences the voices of the people best prepared to respond to the lies being spread. It is impossible to accurately stress the impact this has on election operations across the country. Due to ever changing laws, environmental issues, public health emergencies such as Covid 19, and the legal requirements associated with elections, election officials and election workers spend decades mastering our profession. Replacing 10-20 year veterans who understand the process and pressures of an election, with new inexperienced people who have little to no understanding of elections or election law is what keeps Election Authorities up at night. Entering into an election year as critical as the upcoming cycle in 2024, such expertise is integral, and this continued hemorrhaging of elections officials has the potential to cause innocent errors or oversights that could drive further conspiracy theories and a complete loss of faith in our elections.

Protecting our offices and people against physical threats, responding to avalanches of information requests, and carrying out our primary duties of administering elections in a safe and secure manner all take resources and a mindset from our representatives that abuse of election

workers is a threat to national security. Election authorities will always find a way to get the job done, however, these new pressures call for overdue increased federal support financially and culturally. In Champaign County, prior to my administration, a lack of understanding of how elections actually work combined with decreased funding resulted in Champaign County using voting tabulation machines that were no longer manufactured, and using election software that ran on windows XP! Our Automark machines that were designed to assist voters with disabilities were so outdated and worked so infrequently that our election judges refused to offer them as an option to disabled voters because it actually made voting more difficult for them. Our voting equipment, our central counting station, and all ballots that we are required to store for 18 months or more, are kept in a storefront style metal building that offers very little security. This is the sad and unacceptable norm for some of my colleagues across the country.

In addition, voters all over the Country are clearly expressing an interest in voting by mail. They appreciate the flexibility, accessibility, and the time they have to research candidates and referendum questions which affords them time to cast an informed vote. VBM increases registration, participation, and turnout, yet election officials hesitate to promote VBM because many don't have the funds to pay for the sorting machines, letter opening machines, and drop boxes that must accompany this easy, accessible, and more secure form of voting. Underneath the rhetoric, the unspoken reason contributing to the January 6th attack on our Capital was due to mis/disinformation being spread about VBM. Since American citizens were so misled by the disinformation spread about VBM that they stormed our Capital and threatened the life of the Vice President, can you imagine what they are willing and capable of doing to much less secure venues such as County Clerk offices and polling locations? Sure we can blame former President Trump for the Jan 6th attack but when election officials are forced to work on shoestring budgets, mistakes will be made, human error will increase, and suspicion will abound. You, our duly elected representatives, are being called upon today to assist us. To this day the deceitful, dangerous lies continue to be spread about VBM and yet we see very little support financially from this Congress to help us push back on this highly volatile narrative that threatens more than just frontline workers, but our Nation as a whole.

Earlier this year, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), announced that it will now require states to allocate a

minimum of three percent of the money they receive through the Homeland Security Grant Program to fund election security needs. As welcome as this step was, it is no substitute for regular and reliable funding, especially when this program exists at the pleasure of whomever is President. Congress must step up to appropriate an adequate level of funding towards addressing these threats because it is a matter of National Security.

If America truly desires to continue offering fair, free, and accessible elections to its citizens and wants to continue to serve as an example of how to peacefully transfer power, Congress must prioritize funding elections in the same way it prioritizes funding our brave women and men of the armed forces. Americans are becoming more and more aware of how our tax dollars are spent to establish and restore Democracy abroad, while the very thing that makes us a beacon of light to the rest of the world, begins to dim at home. Therefore, our ability to conduct fair, free, accessible democratic elections is of the utmost importance to maintaining and sustaining our democracy and securing our Nation.

Election workers, who serve as soldiers on the frontlines of democracy in our own way, under unprecedented assault to facilitate our elections, are asking for and clearly need a minimum of four to five billion dollars to adequately address the mounting issues we continue to face. As a taxpaying American citizen, an election authority who believes 100% in participatory democracy, and a voice for my colleagues across America, it is my sincere hope that the Senate will increase its proposed appropriation to at least \$1 Billion dollars to assist the 2024 elections, and the House will do the same.

Thank you all for your time, consideration, and service to our Country.

In Service to the People,

Champaign County Clerk

Aaron Ammons