

United States Senate Committee on Rules & Administration
Hearing
“Ongoing Threats to Election Administration”
Testimony of Alan Farley
November 1, 2023

Chair Klobuchar, Ranking Member Fischer, and Members of the Rules Committee, thank you for this opportunity. I am Alan Farley and I have the privilege to serve as the Administrator of Elections for Rutherford County, Tennessee. I am truly honored to be here!

Thank you for seeking input from local election officials, such as myself, who serve on the front line conducting our local, state, and federal elections. Many times, decisions are made from a 30,000-foot view instead of getting input from the individuals who have spent sleepless nights making sure that everything goes flawlessly on Election Day. Our motto is “We have to be 100 percent right, 100 percent of the time!” We do not have the luxury of accuracy like the weatherman!

Rutherford County is a suburb of Nashville that has a blend of political diversity, with conservatives, progressives, and young millennials, and a college campus of 22,000 students.

Last week, my staff and I hosted an event for 250 of our election workers who worked in 2020 and 2022 and were eager to return. We discussed many topics, including improvements made for the 2024 Presidential election. Threats to election officials were never mentioned. Chain of custody of ballots, cybersecurity issues, provisional balloting, and guessing on how many people would turn out to vote were the focus of all election workers that attended.

Recruitment of election workers is always a priority for local election administrators, but the biggest hurdle we hear from residents is their ability to take off work or children’s extracurricular activities interfering with Election Day, but never that they are concerned for their well-being.

I recognize that each state faces different challenges, but the common element is that all 50 states should assess each situation and determine who is best to address the challenge.

In 2018, I had the pleasure of participating in the Belfer Center’s Defending the Digital Democracy Project at Harvard University. That was a bipartisan effort to work with states and local election jurisdictions to improve our cybersecurity measures and address misinformation because of issues that occurred in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections. I was asked by the DDP leadership team to work

with that group to provide them realistic Election Day scenarios for future table-top exercises. This was an excellent “train the trainer” exercise that prepared state election officials to train local election staff on addressing cyber threats that we could face during elections.

As time passes, so does the need for continued advancement in cybersecurity. I strongly believe the federal government can best serve local election officials with funding and beefing up cybersecurity. If you truly want to secure elections in our nation, invest federal dollars in building a stronger Information Technology structure at the local level. Many counties in the state of Tennessee do not have adequate funding for county IT departments.

In 2020, Rutherford County, which has a population of 380,000 residents, had more residents vote than in any other election before in our county. This occurred during a global pandemic and the most intense political environment ever in our nation’s history. Although strife and fear were conveyed by the state and national media, we did not experience any serious threats. None, whatsoever!

Our election workers were faced with big crowds and long lines due to the 6 feet distancing requirements, which brought about short tempers in some cases. Our staff and election workers were able to handle each situation without incident.

Even though we haven’t had any serious threats, we still have a plan in case one arises. I have met with my local sheriff and his command staff in preparing for the 2024 election cycle. They are aware of the locations and dates when early voting and Election Day will occur in this cycle. All municipal law enforcement jurisdictions are coordinated with the sheriff’s office in the event a problem arises. This allows for the local law enforcement agencies to respond quickly if needed. Our Secretary of State office has direct access to the Tennessee Department of Homeland Security if we need its involvement.

I believe that every participant in the electoral process - voter, election worker, poll watcher, and candidate - should be free to carry out their duties without threat of violence, verbal abuse, or physical harm. However, I do not support making each situation a federal issue.

Local election officials know their community, know our people, and know how best to handle a situation if one occurs. If we need help, we will ask for it, locally! Every local election official wants a smooth and orderly election. I know my counterparts across the state of Tennessee, like me, have a good working relationship with their local law enforcement agencies and District Attorney General.

Local election offices have established processes in place to deal with numerous challenges including threats to election workers. We currently have access to HAVA funds to purchase upgraded voting equipment and harden cybersecurity. Congress

should continue to place its focus on advancing and improving upon cybersecurity measures. That would be of better service and have greater impact on protecting our democracy.

I join many other election administrators throughout our nation who are opposed to adding more bureaucratic strings to administering elections. Thank you again for this opportunity to address this Committee.