



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

July 26, 2018

Governor Scott Walker
Room 115 East
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

HAND DELIVERED

Dear Governor Walker,

In light of more recent attention on the threats to election security from the 2016 elections, states all over the country have been taking steps to address security issues and preserve the integrity of their elections. We write today to encourage you to take all necessary measures to ensure our 2018 elections are secure and free from outside interference. You can begin addressing this by doing everything in your power to expedite the hiring process at the Elections Commission for six positions related to securing our election systems.

Wisconsin has the most de-centralized election system in the nation with over 1,800 clerks. With that amount of clerks, many of whom are new to their positions due to a high turnover rate, it is critical to have a strong central staff at the Elections Commission to help guide these clerks who are responsible for administering elections in communities throughout the state each election cycle. This is an issue that has been raised by local clerks and the Elections Commission over the past several years. Despite the urgency and need for more assistance, the actions taken by your administration have put our elections security at greater risk.

The context of this discussion is important, and the timeline of events over the course of the last three years highlight the failure of your administration to adequately operate and secure our elections.

- In the 2015-17 budget, after losing 26 positions at the Government Accountability Board due to an expiration in Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funded positions, your administration only retained 22 positions, resulting in a net loss of 4 elections-related positions.
- In May 2017 the Joint Finance Committee approved adding five positions related to election security at the Wisconsin Elections Commission. The \$304,100 in GPR spending (matched by the federal government) would have gone toward election administration and security.
- On September 20, 2017, you vetoed those five positions from the 2017-19 budget stating, *“the Elections Commission has been operating effectively with fewer staff... [T]he commission can more cost effectively manage peak workload periods by hiring limited term employees or contractors, as they did during the 2016 presidential election.”*

- On September 22, 2017, the Department of Homeland Security alerted the Elections Commission they had confirmed Russian scanning activity in the Wisconsin Election Database.

It was irresponsible to veto these positions when, that same month, your administration was made aware of Russian cyber actors attempts to attack our democracy. Given the threats and the severity of their potential impact, state leaders should want more election security measures, not less. Our state should want more professional election protection specialists on hand, not less. With our decentralized system, the state should want our local clerks to receive adequate training before administering our elections.

The positions you vetoed included vital election protection services at the Elections Commission and assistance to clerks around the state. Since 2015, the Elections Commission has lost 10 positions, reducing its staff from 36 to 26. In March of 2017, Jodi Jensen, a Republican on the Elections Commission stated, *"We are concerned that such a significant staffing reduction will mean that the agency will not be able to adequately carry out the duties and responsibilities assigned to it under federal and state laws."*

Your veto and other attempts to slowly erode the staffing levels at the Elections Commission send a signal to the Commission and future nefarious actors that Wisconsin does not take the security of its elections seriously.

Despite your cuts to the Elections Commission, Wisconsin was able to secure \$7 million in federal funding thanks to the "Help America Vote Act," which the Elections Commission approved unanimously in April 2018. These funds will go toward backfilling the five positions your administration rejected, and creating a two-factor authentication system in order to access the Wisconsin voter registration database.

Yet a recent article in the Wisconsin State Journal on July 21st, 2018 highlighted that these positions will not be filled by the August 14th Wisconsin primary election, and might not even be filled by the November 6th general election. The explanation is that they have not been filled because your Department of Administration has been slow to approve the positions.

Our state needs a strategy for defending against attacks on election infrastructure and, simply put, this is going to require all hands on deck. While the challenges we face are complex and varied, voting is what defines our nation as a great democracy.

We urge you today to fill these positions as soon as possible to ensure secure elections in August and November.

Sincerely,