

**MAINTAINING ELECTION OPERATIONS IN
THE FACE OF NATURAL DISASTERS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE

ADMINISTRATION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

Printed for the use of the Committee on House Administration



www.govinfo.gov
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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

61-639

WASHINGTON : 2026

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MAINTAINING ELECTION OPERATIONS IN THE FACE OF NATURAL DISASTERS

September 16, 2025

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS,
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:01 p.m., in room 1310, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Laurel Lee [Chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Lee, Murphy, Miller, Sewell, and Morelle.

Staff present: Annemarie Cake, Professional Staff/Deputy Clerk; Rachel Collins, General Counsel; Kristen Monterroso, Director of Operations; Michael Platt, Staff Director; Abby Salter, Deputy General Counsel; Josh Weber, Counsel; Jordan Wilson, Director of Member Services; Khalil Abboud, Minority Deputy Staff Director; Jamie Fleet, Minority Staff Director; Sarah Nasta, Minority Senior Advisor and Director of Outreach; Owen Reilly, Minority Professional Staff; Sean Wright, Minority Chief Counsel; and Nikolas Youngsmith, Minority Elections Counsel.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. LAUREL LEE, CHAIR OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM FLORIDA

Chair LEE. The Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration will come to order.

The title of today's hearing is "Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters."

I note that a quorum is present.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

Also without objection, the hearing record will remain open for 5 legislative days so Members may submit any materials they wish to be included therein.

Thank you, Ranking Member Morelle, Members of the Committee, and our witnesses, for participating in today's hearing.

Free, fair, and secure elections are critical to the democratic process. The Committee on House Administration has broad oversight of Federal election policy. Today, the Subcommittee on Elections continues that oversight with a discussion on election administration during natural disasters.

While laws dictate the time, manner, and place for elections, one factor that is out of our control is the weather. Federal general elections coincide with hurricane season, and the 2024 general elec-

tion demonstrated firsthand how Mother Nature can impact election administration.

While natural disasters may not be the first thing that comes to mind for election administration, our local leaders have experienced them and know that they must be prepared for disasters that could strike at any moment.

In the case of Hurricane Helene and so many that came before it, millions of Americans faced unexpected obstacles when it was time to cast their ballots, and election officials did their best to ensure that every legal ballot was counted.

Today, we will examine how State and local election officials dealt with both logistical and physical problems while administering elections in the aftermath of storms. Their experiences will show how preparation and planning for emergency weather is crucial to secure elections and voter access.

As the former Secretary of State for the State of Florida, which has been hit by more hurricanes than any other State since 1851, I know firsthand how challenging it can be to administer an election in the face of a natural disaster.

Our witnesses today have faced similar challenges when administering elections during extreme weather or while their State is trying to recover from storm damage. Both North Carolina and Florida have been left devastated by hurricanes, and today they will highlight best practices for ensuring smooth election operations before and after natural disasters strike.

Before a natural disaster strikes, State and local election officials should have a strategy in place and be prepared to execute well-planned modifications to keep elections secure, maintain voter confidence, and protect high voter turnout. These preparation and planning efforts can help election officials, voters, and State and local jurisdictions ensure that ballots can be cast on time and in a safe manner.

Additionally, election officials should undergo training to address additional unexpected scenarios that a natural disaster could cause before, during, and after Election Day.

Clear and effective communication to eligible voters in the case of an emergency is critical. North Carolina and Florida have each implemented best practices and shown success in ensuring voters' voices are still heard when a natural disaster strikes close to an election. Today's hearing will detail these best practices as an example for State and local officials across the country.

Election laws in North Carolina and Florida demonstrate that all statutes can authorize flexible and appropriate responses to natural disasters close to Election Day. Consistency in election processes increases trust amongst voters. However, natural disasters threaten consistency, particularly when they hit close to an election.

No matter the circumstances, voters must be confident that their voices will be heard.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to the discussion.

With that, I yield to Ranking Member Morelle for an opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Chair Lee follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHAIR OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ELECTIONS LAUREL LEE**

Free, fair, and secure elections are critical to the democratic process. The Committee on House Administration has broad oversight of Federal election policy. Today, the Subcommittee on Elections continues that oversight with a discussion on election administration during a natural disaster. While laws dictate the time, manner, and place for elections, one factor out of our control is the weather.

Federal general elections coincide with hurricane season, and the 2024 general election demonstrated firsthand how mother nature can impact election administration. While natural disasters may not be the first thing that comes to mind for election administration, our local leaders must prepare for disasters that could strike at any moment. In the case of Hurricane Helene, millions of Americans faced unexpected obstacles when it was time to cast their ballots, and election officials did their best to ensure that every legal ballot cast was counted.

Today, we will examine how State and local election officials dealt with both logistical and physical problems while administering elections in the aftermath of this storm. Their experiences will show how preparation and planning for emergency weather is crucial to secure elections. As the former Secretary of State for the State of Florida, which has been hit by more hurricanes than any other State since 1851, I know firsthand how challenging it can be to administer an election in the face of a natural disaster.

Our witnesses today have faced similar challenges when administering elections during extreme weather or while their State is trying to recover from storm damage. Both North Carolina and Florida were left devastated by Hurricane Helene ahead of the 2024 election. Today, they will highlight best practices for ensuring smooth election operations before and after a natural disaster strikes.

Before a natural disaster strikes, State and local election officials should have a strategy in place and be prepared to execute well-planned modifications to keep the election secure, maintain voter confidence, and protect high voter turnout. These preparation and planning efforts can help election officials, voters, and State and local jurisdictions ensure that ballots can be cast on time, and in a safe manner. Additionally, election officials should undergo training to address additional unexpected scenarios that a natural disaster could cause before, during, and after Election Day.

Clear and effective communication to eligible voters in the case of an emergency is critical. North Carolina and Florida have each implemented best practices and shown success in ensuring voters' voices are still heard when a natural disaster strikes close to an election. Today's hearing will detail these best practices as an example for State and local officials across the country.

Election laws in North Carolina and Florida demonstrate that statutes can authorize flexible and appropriate responses to natural disasters close to Election Day. Consistency in election processes increases trust amongst voters. However, natural disasters threaten consistency, particularly when they hit close to an election. No matter the circumstances, voters must be confident that their voices will be heard.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOSEPH MORELLE, RANKING
MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION,
A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW YORK**

Mr. MORELLE. Well, thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you, Chairwoman Lee.

Thank you to my dear friend, the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, Ms. Sewell.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I think this is—as Chair Lee and I said, this is the third time we have tried to organize this, so the third time is the charm, it turns out. This is really a very, very important conversation to have, and I am grateful to the Chair for pulling us all together and, again, to all the witnesses for being here.

I think it is important to kind of take stock of the moment that we are in. A recent report found that, last year, there were 27 indi-

vidual weather and climate disasters with at least a billion dollars in property damages. That is really pretty extraordinary.

As the number continues to grow and the amount of damage that storms do, unfortunately, the administration continues to deny the climate crisis, denying science and actively impairing our readiness to respond.

Back in June, I sent a letter to FEMA expressing concern over the lack of publicly accessible data on how and where Federal resources are allocated in response to Federal disasters, a problem which has gotten even worse since January with the new administration.

As the hurricane season began, the President's FEMA had reportedly said that he was unaware hurricane season had started. I am assuming that was a joke, but, joking or not, it is not funny and it is unacceptable.

We have seen, since the beginning of this year, fired Federal workers, ended grant programs that have long built resiliency and mitigated impacts of disasters, and actively dismantling agencies that support our critical infrastructure.

A recent GAO report found that the recent cuts to FEMA have severely impacted the Government's ability to respond to a hurricane season like last year's.

Natural disasters and severe weather events and the damage they inflict are not going to stop regardless of whether we bury our head in the proverbial sand or not; they are coming whether we like it or not. These actions do not strengthen our elections or our democracy. In fact, they make us less secure.

Disasters do not care about partisan affiliation, and they do not care that it is Election Day. They do not care if a person is rich or poor, and our response to them should not either.

When Hurricane Sandy hit New York and New Jersey just days before the 2012 Presidential election—hard to believe it was that long ago—it displaced hundreds of thousands of people and caused significant damage, yet we still needed to carry on a Presidential election.

The same thing happened in North Carolina just last year, which was referenced by the Chair. Hurricane Helene hit the State in late September 2024 after absentee voting had already begun and less than 3 weeks before early voting was set to begin, and the storm caused tremendous damage. I do not have to tell our witness about that. In western North Carolina, more than 100 people died as a result of that tragedy.

Election officials across the State, led by then-executive director Karen Brinson Bell, quickly got to work ensuring North Carolinians could cast a ballot. Because of their hard work—she and all the people who were part of the election infrastructure—voter turnout was actually higher in the 25 disaster-area counties than it was statewide, which is pretty remarkable when you consider it.

The State Board of Elections in Buncombe County, the hardest hit area in the State, won national awards from the Election Assistance Commission for their emergency response and planning.

Unfortunately, Ms. Brinson Bell was recently removed from her position after the Republicans in the North Carolina legislature pulled what I can only describe as a blatantly partisan takeover of

this board of elections, shifting the power to appoint the board's members from a Governor, who happened to be a Democrat, to the State auditor, which seems like a pretty illogical move.

Anyway, thank you, Ms. Brinson Bell, for being here today to share your experience and expertise on this issue, and thank you to you and your staff for the hard work in the last elections.

Look, the last comment I will make is, we need to fully fund our elections. Election officials need additional resources even under ideal circumstances, let alone in the midst of natural disaster. When a disaster hits, we must make sure they have the funds and support they need to adapt operations and assist voters to ensure every voter can still cast a ballot.

Last week in the Appropriations Committee, I said that \$15 million in election funding that House Republicans have proposed is certainly not enough. It is a drop in the ocean of funding needs, and I will continue to push for additional funding and consistent elections funding. When disaster strikes, election administrators must provide voters with options for casting a ballot.

Later today—and I will close with this—I am introducing the Climate Resilient Elections Act with many of my colleagues, a bill that would require the GAO to analyze and report on ways the Federal Government can better assist in administering elections following a natural disaster. It would grant funding opportunities to strengthen American elections.

I would also say in closing—and then I will yield back, and I appreciate the courtesy of the Chair—today is a moment to recognize today is National Voter Registration Day, as I think we all know. As we talk about natural disasters and the impact they can have, we should also work to ensure that every eligible American citizen has every opportunity to register to vote, update their voter registration information, and cast a ballot should they choose to do so. We certainly hope that they will choose to do that.

Thank you again for holding this hearing—I am very appreciative—on an important topic. With that, I will yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ranking Member Morelle follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION JOSEPH MORELLE**

A recent report found that, last year, there were 27 individual weather and climate disasters with at least a billion dollars in property damages. That is really pretty extraordinary. As the number continues to grow and the amount of damage that storms do, unfortunately, the administration continues to deny the climate crisis, denying science and actively impairing our readiness to respond.

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Natural disasters and severe weather events and the damage they inflict are not going to stop regardless of whether we bury our head in the proverbial sand or not; they are coming whether we like it or not. These actions do not strengthen our elections or our democracy. In fact, they make us less secure. Disasters do not care

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Chair LEE. With that, I yield to Ranking Member Sewell for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TERRI A. SEWELL, RANKING MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALABAMA

Ms. SEWELL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

As the Ranking Member of the Elections Subcommittee and the Representative of Alabama's Civil Rights District, there is nothing more important to me than ensuring that every eligible voter is able to cast their ballot and have their voices heard.

I am glad that today we are focusing on the impact of natural disasters on election operations, because my district is under the constant threat of natural disasters. Since 1980, Alabama has experienced 102 Federal disaster declarations. Every year, tornadoes devastate communities I represent, from the April 27th, 2021, tor-

nado that claimed the lives of 64 Alabamians to the January 2023 storm that devastated my hometown of Selma.

Every Member of Congress who has experienced a community impacted by a natural disaster knows that extensive coordination between local, State, and Federal partners is required to restore basic services and infrastructure to the people impacted by these events.

Our election administrators are not immune to these disruptions. Natural disasters can damage or destroy polling stations, voting machines, ballots, or other infrastructure such as the power or delivery of the mail. They can damage or destroy people's homes and belongings, including documents needed to meet voter ID requirements.

Moreover, storms do not care if we are 6 months, 6 weeks, or 6 days away from an election; election officials and Federal partners must be prepared for all scenarios so that they can ensure that voters are able to cast their ballots.

In the past, severe weather events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires had more defined seasons, but we have seen that these seasons are lengthening. Regardless of when a disaster hits, a community recovery from disaster and destruction can take weeks, months, and, I can tell you, even years.

Voters in Alabama and across the country deserve to know that we are prepared to manage the impact of these events and that we have plans in place to protect their access to the ballot box. As Members of Congress, we should be working overtime to ensure that election officials have the resources they need to administer elections and that every voter has a fair opportunity to cast their ballot. Voting must be resilient, even in the face of crisis.

I cannot ignore the fact that we are holding a hearing to discuss the impact of natural disasters on election administration when the Trump administration is proposing to make major cuts to FEMA, undermining climate science and halting climate research at every turn.

The President's reckless cuts to vital services like FEMA will increase the burden for States as they try to recover from recent disasters and try to plan for the future. Sadly, congressional Republicans are standing by silently as President Trump fires staff, cuts funding, and rescinds grants from these critical programs.

I am looking forward to our discussion today, because we need to take a hard look at how Republicans' cuts will hurt our disaster preparedness and place new burdens on our election officials. If we are going to have a candid discussion, the Federal Government must be an equal and good-faith partner in that endeavor.

Denying climate science, cutting recovery personnel and resources, spreading misinformation and disinformation, and threatening to withhold resources from the President's political opponents does not help election officials, voters, or the security of our elections.

We must address the chronic underfunding of our elections. It is simple as that.

We must be proactive as we think about ways to implement policies that not only expand access to the ballot box for every eligible

voter but ensures that our election infrastructure is resilient and does not crumble in the face of a natural disaster.

When the next disaster strikes—and it will—it is the American people who will suffer from the lack of preparation and resources. We will not forget this administration's efforts to make it harder for Americans to vote and reducing the few resources that we currently have for election administrators.

The American people's right to vote is sacred, and I know that I will continue to work tirelessly with my colleagues across the aisle to make sure that we have adequate funding and that every eligible voter has a right to vote.

With that, I would like to ask, Madam Chair, if I can have unanimous consent to enter into the record a January 2025 report published by the Election Infrastructure Initiative detailing the significant emergency costs experienced by election officials during the 2024 election.

Chair LEE. Without objection, so ordered.

[The report referred to follows:]

EMERGENCY COSTS IN THE 2024 ELECTION

LOCAL ELECTION DEPARTMENTS NEED FUNDING TO PREPARE FOR THE PREDICTABLY UNPREDICTABLE TO SECURE OUR ELECTIONS



Election officials across the country had to respond to emergencies big and small, often by spending unallocated funds.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2024 presidential election was, overall, an example of effective election administration. Voters turned out in high numbers, with more opting to cast their ballot early or by mail than any election before 2020. Improvements in ballot processing equipment and processes helped some states report their results earlier and brought more transparency to the election process than ever before. And while many voters had low confidence prior to November 5 that the election would be run well,¹ those numbers at least temporarily rebounded after Election Day.²

At the same time, there were concerning trends. Foreign adversaries including China, Iran and Russia engaged in malign influence campaigns, spreading propaganda and lies about our election process. Bomb threats were made against more than 100 elections offices and polling places across eight states on and after Election Day, many of which originated from Russian email domains.

But one of the biggest themes of 2024 for election officials was the need to respond to emergencies big and small, often by spending unallocated funds. Based on 105 news reports across 39 states, **we estimate that emergency spending reached \$33 million** in the period leading up and immediately following the presidential election.

This number is almost certainly an underestimate, as 105 reports come nowhere close to covering all of the 10,000 election jurisdictions across the country.³

We project another \$160 million in imminent costs that elections offices will need to take on for recovery and restoration from Hurricanes Helene and Milton, as well as upgrades needed to increase the security of ballot drop boxes.

Because local election budgets are so lean, election administrators have to prioritize planning for the most critical functions of their office and the most likely scenarios.

Type of Infrastructure Cost	Estimated Cost	States with Reported Costs
TOTAL COSTS	\$33,000,000	39
Ballot reprints	\$940,000	16
Staff & equipment capacity overload	\$1,700,000	12
Broken equipment	\$3,900,000	17
Communications	\$5,800,000	10
Law enforcement & security	\$7,000,000	9
Litigation and policy changes	\$4,700,000	8
Polling place changes	\$3,500,000	10
NC Hurricane Helene appropriations	\$5,000,000	1

¹ "Most voters are confident that elections will be run well, but more skepticism among Trump than Harris supporters," Pew Research Center, October 23, 2024.

² "Voters Broadly Positive About How Elections Were Conducted, in Sharp Contrast to 2020," Pew Research Center, December 4, 2024.

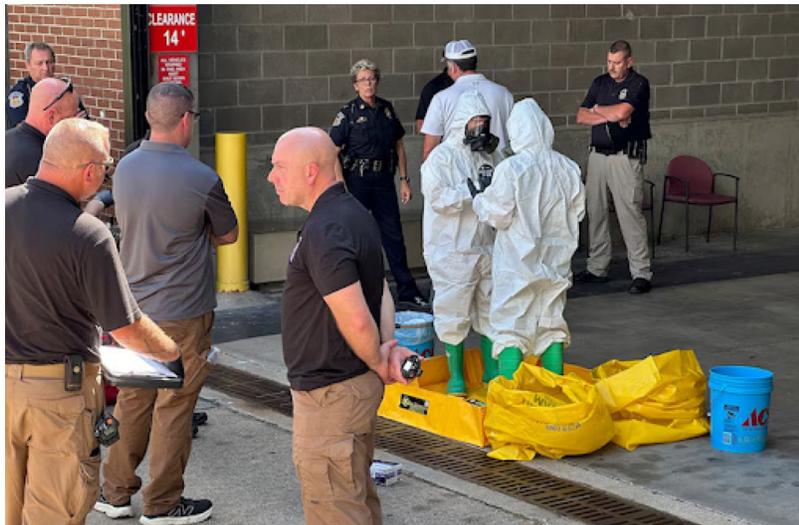
³ "Who is in charge of elections in my state?," United States Election Assistance Commission, October 26, 2022.

That leaves them without any cushion built into their budgets to respond to the unexpected. So when local election officials face any number of curveballs—including but not limited to unexpectedly high early turnout, aging machine breakdowns, natural disasters, interference from foreign entities, attacks on election infrastructure, litigation and last minute policy changes—they have to scramble. Those very real scenarios not only come with very real costs, but lead to delays and disruptions to voting.

What is worse is that these disruptions can provide further opportunities for foreign adversaries to spread falsities that undermine the integrity of our elections or introduce

vulnerabilities to physical attacks against voters and administrators alike.

While county governments were able to step in to solve emergencies in the 2024 election, many of the issues that occurred were avoidable with sufficient investment. Truly secure elections allow administrators to plan ahead and mitigate challenges, rather than needing to react and allocate emergency funds during the voting period. Reliable and sustainable public funding for elections can improve the voter experience, reduce security vulnerabilities, improve public access to information and transparency and ultimately restore public trust in our elections.



A suspicious package was sent to the Missouri Secretary of State's Office on Sept. 17, 2024, prompting inspection from a hazmat crew of the National Guard's Civilian Support Team. Suspicious mail containing white powder was sent to elections offices in at least 15 additional states. [ABC News](#).

BACKGROUND

ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE IS CHRONICALLY UNDERFUNDED

Investing in secure, reliable elections is essential to preserving and protecting our democracy for all Americans. Recognizing the importance and vulnerability of our nation's election systems, the Department of Homeland Security designated election infrastructure as critical infrastructure in 2017.

Unfortunately, that designation has not come with sufficient financial support, leaving American election infrastructure woefully underfunded.

According to a study from MIT,⁴ public spending on election services ranks near the bottom of public services funding, about the same as what local governments spend on parking facilities. And the need is growing: **An analysis of election infrastructure needs across the nation revealed that more than \$50 billion is needed over the next decade to fully modernize our systems and protect against emerging threats.**⁵

County and state budgets alone cannot fully meet growing election security expenditures, nor should they have to.⁶ That has led

local election officials to repeatedly call on Congress to provide robust and consistent funding to meet growing security and infrastructure expenses.^{7,8,9} Secretaries of state from across the political spectrum have also advocated for a federal investment in securing election processes to match the federal mandates election officials must fulfill.^{10,11}

Congress has long been aware of the inadequacy of federal investment in election security. After nearly a decade of essentially no federal funding, Congress stepped up in 2018 (\$380 million) and 2020 (\$425 million), with another \$400 million in 2020 distributed through the CARES Act.¹² Those grants helped election officials begin addressing years of delayed upgrades, make improvements in cybersecurity protections and adapt to voting changes during the peak of the COVID pandemic.

But as the threats and costs continued to increase, federal support slowed, and in some years stopped altogether.¹³ In 2019 and 2021, Congress zeroed out funding for election security operations. In both 2022 and 2023 Congress provided \$75 million. In 2024 that number dropped to just \$55 million.¹⁴

A 2022 report by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform concluded: "Congress

4 Claire DeSoi, "Lessons Learned from the 2020 Election," MIT Election Data and Science Lab and American Enterprise Institute; September 23, 2021.

5 "50 States of Need," Election Infrastructure Initiative; accessed Fall 2024.

6 "The State of Election Funding in 2024," Institute for Responsive Government; August 13, 2024.

7 "EII Sends Letter from 60+ Local Election Officials, 30+ Nonprofits, and Faith Leaders Calling for 400M in FY25 Election Infrastructure Funding," Election Infrastructure Initiative; May 31, 2024.

8 Aaron Ockerman, "I work with Ohio election workers. Free and fair elections are at risk without investment," The Columbus Dispatch; July 31, 2024.

9 Silvan, Mellerio, "NACo sends letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committee leadership urging continued election security grants funding for Fiscal Year 2024," National Association of Counties; April 14, 2024.

10 John Thurston, "Arkansas election integrity solid, but more federal funding needed for protection," Talk Business & Politics; May 26, 2024.

11 Carol Aichele, "Election security is national security — Congress should treat it that way," Broad + Liberty; July 29, 2024.

12 Karen L. Shanton, "Election Administration: Federal Grant Funding for States and Localities," Congressional Research Service; May 8, 2023.

13 Karen L. Shanton, "Election Administration: Overview of FY2024 Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) Appropriations," Congressional Research Service; September 8, 2023.

14 "FY24 Congressional Budget Preserves Funding for Local Election Departments," Election Infrastructure Initiative; March 21, 2024.

should pass legislation to address the funding gap for election jurisdictions across the country and to counter threats to election officials. Enacting regular, yearly appropriations for election funding will allow election officials to invest in physical and cyber security and modernize election equipment.”¹⁵ Professor Zachary Mohr, an expert in election funding, told Congress in early 2024: “The sad truth is that local financing underfunds election administration. What is needed is regular, equitable and meaningful funding for elections.”¹⁶

This chronic underfunding makes dealing with the emergencies that come up in the course of administering each election—from foreign interference and attacks on election infrastructure to natural disasters to printing and equipment problems—that much more difficult.

¹⁵ “Exhausting and Dangerous: The Dire Problem of Election Misinformation and Disinformation,” Committee on Oversight and Reform U.S. House of Representatives; August 11, 2022.

¹⁶ “Statement of Zachary Mohr, Ph.D.,” Committee on House Administration; February 7, 2024.

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

One of the most concerning storylines of the 2024 election was the multiple, systematic attempts by foreign adversaries including China, Iran, and Russia to interfere with the democratic process.

In some cases, threats of violence interrupted the election process—at least 67 bomb threats¹⁷ to polling stations were made in dozens of counties¹⁸ across 7 states,¹⁹ many of which originated from Russian email domains.²⁰

In others, foreign adversaries turned to malign influence campaigns and cyber attacks against localities. Lies and propaganda targeting both the election process and candidate campaigns were allegedly disseminated by Chinese bots²¹ and Russian troll farms.²² Iran successfully hacked the Trump campaign, and reportedly targeted the Harris campaign as well. And while there is no evidence to show it was politically motivated, the Russia-based ransomware group Ransomhub reportedly extracted 47 gigabytes of data—which could include ballot data and voter records as far back as 2008—during a July hack of **Jefferson County, Kentucky**.²³

Election officials and law enforcement worked tirelessly to minimize the impact of each of these attacks. But that work—whether it took the shape of bomb sweeps and additional security or public messaging campaigns to address falsities—takes time

and money.

BOMB THREATS REQUIRE LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERVENTION, EXTENDED POLLING HOURS

Sometimes the mere threat of violence is enough to disrupt the elections process. Such was the case with the dozens of bomb threats levied against polling places in **at least 25 counties across Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin**.²⁴ Elections offices in more than half of Minnesota counties also received bomb



*The **Santa Clara County Sheriff's** office briefs reporters at the Registrar of Voters. Elections jurisdictions across the country have prioritized building relationships with law enforcement to prepare for potential interference or attacks. [Santa Clara County Office of the Sheriff](#).*

17 Collier, Kingkade, Winter, "Election Day bomb threats overwhelmingly targeted Democrat-leaning counties," NBC News; November 8, 2024.

18 Collier, Kingkade, Winter, "Election Day bomb threats overwhelmingly targeted Democrat-leaning counties," NBC News; November 8, 2024.

19 Fausset, Levenson, Vigdor, "Bomb Threats Hit Several States, but None Are Found Credible," New York Times; November 5, 2024.

20 "FBI Statement on Bomb Threats to Polling Locations," Federal Bureau of Investigations; November 5, 2024.

21 Steven Lee Myers, "Bots Linked to China Target Republican House and Senate Candidates, Microsoft Says," New York Times; October 23, 2024.

22 "Georgia's top election official warns of fake online video; 'Likely foreign interference,'" ABC News; October 31, 2024.

23 Sophia Fox-Sowell, "Data stolen in Jefferson County, Kentucky, cyberattack includes election info, employee reviews," StateScoop; August 15, 2024.

24 Meredith Moran, "Counties overcome challenges on Election Day," National Association of Counties; November 18, 2024.

threats after election day as they were tabulating the vote.²⁵

These threats—many of which appeared to originate from Russian email domains²⁶—represent a new way that foreign adversaries are attempting to interfere with our democratic process. Bomb threats are particularly pernicious because they require immediate response regardless of how credible they might be. In addition to interrupting the voting process, responding required intervention from local law enforcement and in some cases resulted in the need to extend polling hours.

Those responses cost money.

Fulton County, Georgia, a top target of this tactic, stationed a police officer at each of the county's 177 polling locations²⁷ at an estimated cost of \$73,000. The force handled 32 reports throughout the day with only five evacuations.

Law enforcement officers across the country were forced to take similar measures to address at least 67 election day bomb threats. Election offices in **Minnesota** were on watch even longer, with more than half of the state's 87 counties receiving the warnings in the week after the election. **We estimate that conducting the resulting bomb sweeps cost the affected counties at least \$13,000.**

Chilling as these events might be, collaboration between local law enforcement and election officials across the country minimized their impact on Americans' ability to exercise their right to vote. Ensuring that election officials have the resources they need to prepare for and respond to similar or novel threats in the future is necessary to keeping our elections safe and secure.

ADDRESSING FOREIGN DECEPTION CAMPAIGNS FALLS TO ELECTIONS OFFICIALS

The 2024 general election was rife with examples of foreign entities attempting to deceive American voters. Aided in part by artificial intelligence and the ability to spread lies and propaganda quickly through social media,²⁸ such efforts have become cheaper and increasingly ubiquitous.

The vital work of inoculating against and responding to falsities about the democratic process has become yet another responsibility for elections administrators to own. And while staff across the country in jurisdictions large and small stepped up to the plate, elections offices had to invest significant time and money in informing the public of the truth about the process.

No voter should be hearing about our election process from a foreign government before they are hearing from their own election administrator. That is why many officials ran public information campaigns explaining the process and attempting to inoculate against predictable false claims in the weeks and months leading up to November. The **Illinois State Board of Elections**, for example, used its social media channels to educate voters on the process²⁹ and ran ads on local news stations that urged voters to be wary of information spread by sources other than elections administrators themselves.³⁰

That kind of ad campaign likely cost ISBE \$96,000.

But preemption alone is not enough to maintain public trust in the face of viral election lies—rapid response is also crucial.

25 Riley Moser, "Election offices in over half of Minnesota counties have received bomb threats since Friday, secretary of state's office says," CBS News, November 14, 2024.

26 "FBI Statement on Bomb Threats to Polling Locations," Federal Bureau of Investigation, November 5, 2024.

27 "Georgia Election Updates | Gov. Brian Kemp congratulates Donald Trump," Fox 5 Atlanta, November 6, 2024.

28 Shannon Bond, "U.S. says Russian bot farm used AI to impersonate Americans," NPR, July 9, 2024.

29 "Illinois State Board of Elections," X, Accessed Fall 2024.

30 Arriyonna Allen, "Illinois officials warn against election misinformation online," Paducah Sun, October 2, 2024.

Election officials in **San Luis Obispo County, California**;³¹ **Troy City, Michigan**;³² **Houston, Texas**;³³ and **Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**³⁴ all had to respond to text campaigns that sent voters inaccurate or misleading information about their registration or voting status. **Contacting voters through robocalls and mailers to assert the facts, a best practice in such a situation, could cost an estimated \$4.5 million across the affected counties.**

The 2024 general election also saw a number of fake or false videos claiming to demonstrate widespread voter fraud or other election irregularities. One viral video, a hoax likely produced by Russian troll farms, showed two people claiming to be from Haiti illegally voting, and required a response from **Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger**.³⁵ Another false video claimed to have testimony from a former aide to **Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes** falsely explaining state leaders' plans to rig the election for Vice President Harris. That video came from a group founded by a Russian oligarch that has previously carried out malign influence operations, according to U.S. and European intelligence sources.³⁶

There were surely many more examples of similar activity which could have been spread by either foreign adversaries or other nefarious groups. Responding rapidly and comprehensively often includes holding press conferences, giving interviews, and notifying voters directly.

While a few jurisdictions have the resources to employ communications professionals to do this work, budget restrictions mean that many have to juggle it alongside their other responsibilities. Fully funding election

infrastructure would provide jurisdictions with the ability to bring on staff with the right skillset to handle these situations without taking away capacity from the fundamental work of conducting an election.

EQUIPMENT MALFUNCTIONS MAY PROVIDE FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

In its February 2024 annual threat assessment, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence presciently warned that China, Russia, and Iran might use their growing and increasingly sophisticated malign influence operations to impact U.S. elections.³⁷

That prediction proved accurate. We should prepare for our adversaries to continue to look for vulnerabilities through which they can attempt to undermine our democratic process.

Aging and broken equipment represent one such vulnerability. Simply put, any malfunction in technology or perceived hiccup in the election process can provide a hook that can be used to drive false claims and sow doubt in the legitimacy of the election results.

31 Ania Keenan, "SLO County voters are getting mysterious texts about their registration. What's going on?," The Tribune; August 5, 2024.

32 Jenna Prestininzi, "Troy clerk's office urges residents to beware following spam ballot texts," Detroit Free Press; October 8, 2024.

33 Jen Rice, "Text Message Misleading", Houston Chronicle; October 22, 2024.

34 Emily Neil, "A phishing scam is targeting some Pa. voters. Here's what to know," WHYY PBS; August 28, 2024.

35 Jason Morris, Paul P. Murphy, and Sean Lyngaas, "Raffensperger says viral video of alleged voting fraud 'obviously fake' and likely foreign meddling in Georgia's elections," CNN News; November 1, 2024.

36 Alexis Dominguez, "Arizona political officials address misinformation ahead of Election Day," Arizona Family; November 4, 2024.

37 "Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," Office of the Director of National Intelligence; February 5, 2024.

LOW PUBLIC TRUST IN ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATION PROVIDES FERTILE GROUND FOR MALIGN INFLUENCE

Leading up to the 2024 general election, confidence in election administration was concerningly low. According to the Pew Research Center, 27% of registered voters surveyed—including 42% of Pres. Trump's supporters—believed that the election would be administered “not too well” or “not well at all.”³⁸

Local officials ran an effective election in 2024, and public trust at least temporarily rebounded in the weeks after the election was called.³⁹ But that was not before multiple cases in which issues with technology led to the rapid online spread of false claims about widespread voter fraud.^{40 41}

Regardless of how quick or effective an elections office is in responding to these claims, a viral post can reach thousands or millions of Americans that will never see the correction.

These examples could serve as a playbook for future efforts by foreign actors to disrupt our elections process and undermine trust in the results. Providing elections offices with the resources they need to properly equip their operation is an important step to mitigate that risk.

That is not to say that new equipment alone will completely solve the problem: there will inevitably be some malfunctions. But by ensuring that towns and counties have the resources to replace the most error-prone, older equipment, we can reduce the number of opportunities that malicious actors in other countries have to gain a foothold with false statements that undermine the will and trust of the American people.

38 “Voters’ evaluations of the 2024 election process,” Pew Research Center; December 4, 2024.

39 “Voters’ evaluations of the 2024 election process,” Pew Research Center; December 4, 2024.

40 Caleb McCullough, “Ballot scanning errors caused voting delays in one Pennsylvania county, but no evidence of a ‘steal,’” Politifact; November 5, 2024.

41 “Viral video shows malfunctioning voting machine in Laurel County, Kentucky,” WDRB; October 31, 2024.

FULLY FUNDING ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE IS CRUCIAL TO RESILIENCE AGAINST THREATS

In the face of cyber attacks, foreign propaganda, and bomb threats, characteristically enterprising officials ran a safe, secure, and relatively smooth election in 2024.

But chronic underfunding of elections infrastructure meant those officials had to triage their response to these attempts to undermine our democratic system. That includes finding skilled workers not on payroll because elections offices can’t afford them, pulling employees from other areas of government off of their critical functions, and paying overtime.

And responding to issues is almost always more costly than preventing them—many responses involve one-time costs that don’t strengthen our system’s resilience for the long term.

Ensuring that our elections are safe, secure, and reliable in the face of threats from foreign adversaries and anti-democratic actors is of the utmost importance. Doing so will require updating old equipment, hiring and training necessary staff, increasing transparency in the system, and proactively inoculating against potential vectors of foreign deception. Providing local jurisdictions with adequate and consistent funding can do just that, ensuring that they are ready for the next election and beyond.

ATTACKS ON ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE

The 2024 general election also saw domestic attacks on election infrastructure and administration, namely fires set to mailboxes and ballot drop boxes in Arizona,⁴² Oregon,⁴³ and Washington.⁴⁴

ELECTIONS OFFICIALS IN OREGON, WASHINGTON RUSHED TO MINIMIZE IMPACT OF BALLOT BOX ATTACKS

Putting out metaphorical fires is just a part of the job for local elections officials across the country. But after an incendiary device damaged hundreds of ballots at a drop box in Vancouver, Washington, **County Auditor Greg Kimsey and the Clark County elections office** were left handling the fallout from an actual fire.⁴⁵

"I'm very saddened by this incident," Kimsey said in a statement. "This action is an attack on American democracy."⁴⁶

Kimsey didn't allow his disappointment to get in the way of taking action. **Clark County elections staff** immediately got to work drying the surviving ballots to identify affected voters so that they could contact them and ensure they had the opportunity to cast a replacement ballot. Within a day, the elections office was able to identify 488 damaged ballots. Most of the affected voters had already requested a replacement; the



Ballots burned in Vancouver, Washington are laid out to dry so that election officials could identify the affected voters.
[Greg Kimsey](#).

office mailed ballots to the 143 voters who did not request one before the week was out.⁴⁷ They also planned to email, call or text these voters to notify them of the situation.⁴⁸ **The emergency communications and expedited shipping of ballots cost an estimated \$32,000.**

42 Timm, Mullen, "Ballots damaged in USPS mailbox fire in Phoenix," NBC News, October 24, 2024.

43 "Update: Tips Sought in Ballot Box Fires, \$2,500 Reward Available," Portland Police Bureau, October 30, 2024.

44 Berry, Bell, "Hundreds of ballots possibly burned after Vancouver ballot box arson, FBI investigating," KATU2 ABC, October 29, 2024.

45 "About 475 damaged ballots retrieved from burned drop box in Washington state, auditor says," AP News, October 30, 2024.

46 Updated: Clark County Auditor statement regarding ballots destroyed in ballot box," Clark County Auditor, Washington, October 28, 2024.

47 Updated: Clark County Auditor statement regarding ballots destroyed in ballot box," Clark County Auditor, Washington, October 28, 2024.

48 Hubbard, Sganga, "What to know after ballot box fires in Washington state and Oregon," CBS News, October 30, 2024.

Six ballots were unidentifiable, and more could have been completely destroyed. "I don't know how many exactly, but I suspect there were because there was a fair amount of ash at the bottom of the ballot drop box," Kimsey told *CBS News*.⁴⁹

In addition to immediate response, **Clark County elections officials** worked to prevent any further attacks. They assigned staff to observe each of the county's 22 drop boxes 24 hours a day alongside increased law enforcement presence,⁵⁰ **costing the county roughly \$134,000.**⁵¹ Similar treatment for Washington state's remaining 523 drop boxes⁵² would cost approximately **\$3.2 million more.**

The **Clark County elections office** also announced plans to increase the number of pick ups per day,⁵³ including more in the evening to minimize the number of ballots in drop boxes overnight, when similar attacks are considered most likely to occur.⁵⁴ **Assuming the county added three pick ups per day over seven days leading up to the election, the change would cost Clark County an estimated \$9,000. Adding pick ups across the state given the at-large status of the attacker would cost an estimated \$220,000 statewide.**

Thanks to the work of the **Clark County election office**, the public was informed of the situation, no repeat attacks occurred, and voters were not disenfranchised. **The cost of responding to this emergency, not including overtime involved in recovering ballots, totaled an estimated \$180,000 for the County. Statewide precautions would have added an additional \$3.4 million.**

FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEMS CAN HELP MINIMIZE IMPACT OF SIMILAR ATTACKS

Just across the Columbia River and the state line from Vancouver, a similar, reportedly linked attack was carried out against a **Portland, Oregon** ballot drop box. Only three of more than 400 ballots were damaged thanks to the box's fire suppression system.⁵⁵ That system significantly reduced the need for the **Multnomah County elections office** to invest the staff time and resources in salvaging ballots, contacting affected voters, and mailing out replacement ballots.

Ballot drop box fire suppressants are an important and worthwhile investment to ensure that Americans' voices are heard, especially given increasing adoption of absentee voting. That remains true even though such systems occasionally fail, as was the case with the Vancouver box's fire suppressant.

Connecticut recognized this fact and took action in response to news of the Portland and Vancouver ballot box attacks. The state sent all of its towns and cities fire suppression canisters, which burst open and drop a powder to extinguish flames when exposed to heat.⁵⁶ Installing the canisters in each of the state's 200 drop boxes cost an estimated \$12,000 in materials and labor. **Based upon publicly available data and best practices on ballot drop boxes, replicating this effort across the country could cost \$490,000.**

49 Hubbard, Sganga, "What to know after ballot box fires in Washington state and Oregon," *CBS News*; October 30, 2024.

50 "Updated: Clark County Auditor statement regarding ballots destroyed in ballot box," *Clark County Auditor*, Washington; October 28, 2024.

51 Paul Gronke, "Explainer & Lessons Learned From the Ballot Drop Box Fires in Multnomah County, Oregon and Clark County, Washington," *EVIC News*; October 30, 2024.

52 "Drop Box and Voting Center Locations," *Washington Secretary of State*; Accessed Fall 2024.

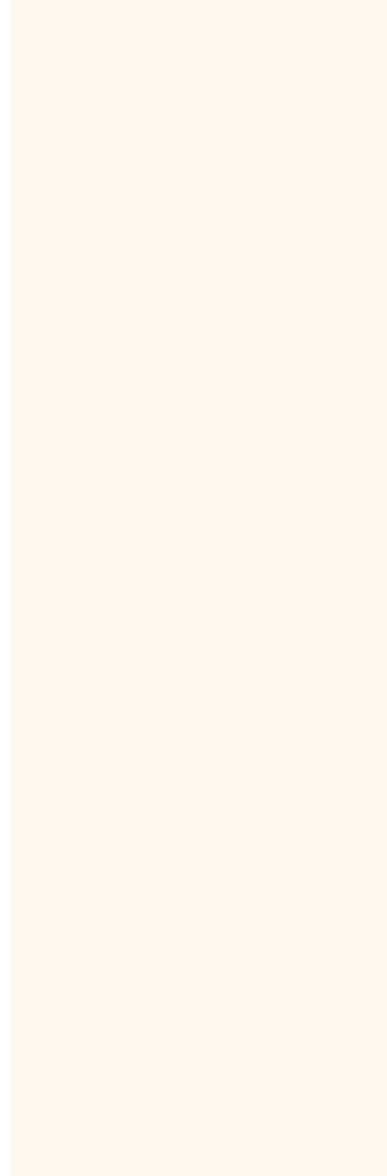
53 Kaja Hubbard and Nicole Sganga, "What to know after ballot box fires in Washington state and Oregon," *CBS News*; October 30, 2024.

54 Dani Anguiano, "Hundreds of damaged ballots saved following fire at drop box in Washington", *The Guardian*; October 30, 2024.

55 Chris Boyette, "Police are searching for the person who set ballot boxes on fire in Washington and Oregon. Here's what we know," *CNN News*; October 30, 2024.

56 Toni Aiello, "Connecticut safeguards ballot drop boxes with fire suppression devices," *CBS News*; November 1, 2024.

Connecticut's solution was an innovative and worthwhile stopgap with so little time before the election. But there is no guarantee that this approach would work for every drop box. Additionally, knowing that the individual is still at large and that similar attacks could destroy many ballots, voters deserve better than a bubblegum-and-paperclip solution. **To upgrade all eligible elections offices' drop boxes to the highest security would take an estimated investment of roughly \$48 million.**



BALLOT DELAYS & REPRINTS

Recent elections have seen an explosion in absentee and early in-person voting. That trend continued in 2024. At least 88.4 million⁵⁷ of the more than 155 million ballots⁵⁸ cast in the 2024 presidential election, or 56.9% of all votes, were submitted before election day, with strong participation across party affiliation.⁵⁹ While 56.9% is not as high as the rates during the pandemic-impacted 2020 election (69.2%), it represents a significant jump from 2016 (38.8%) and 2012 (31.8%).⁶⁰

The shift toward early and mail-in voting, though popular among Americans, has added additional pressures and costs for elections administrators.

Cobb County, Georgia, experienced this firsthand when it received a surge of requests for absentee ballots ahead of its state's October 25 deadline. That surge, combined with a broken ballot printer and an influx of calls from voters that pulled staff from their work processing applications, put **Cobb County's election office** behind the eight ball. They were not going to be able to get absentee ballots to all the last-minute requestees within the three days required by state law.⁶¹

Nonetheless, the **Cobb County election office** was committed to getting absentee ballots to the voters who legally requested them as soon as possible. That effort was all the more important given that Georgia law



Printed ballots are staged ahead of the 2020 election at Renbeck Election Services site in Phoenix, AZ. The company oversaw production of over 10 million ballots that year. [NPR](#)

57 "Early Voting", NBC News, Accessed Fall 2024

58 "2024 National Popular Vote Tracker", Cook Political Report, Access Fall 2024

59 "Early Voting", NBC News, Accessed Fall 2024

60 "Early Voting", NBC News, Accessed Fall 2024

61 Thad Moore, "Cobb County spent more than \$200,000 to deliver tardy absentee ballots to voters", The Atlantic Journal-Constitution, November 27, 2024

also requires mail-in ballots to be received by 7 pm on Election Day to be tabulated. That meant expediting shipment of the ballot, both to and from voters.

Cobb County normally pays roughly \$0.97 to mail a voter an absentee ballot. But overnighting mail is significantly more expensive. **Due to the time-crunch, that cost skyrocketed to approximately \$63 per ballot,⁶² costing the county an estimated \$220,000 dollars.**

Jurisdictions will always need to spend money to abide by state and federal voting laws. That is what it takes to conduct reliable elections where all Americans can ensure their vote is counted and heard. However, when overwhelmed counties face situations similar to the one that played out in Cobb County, it is evident that spending resources on short-term patches fails to deliver the same impact as an investment that will make future elections secure, reliable and accessible for many cycles to come.

To make the switch to investments with long-term benefits, election offices need consistent, adequate funding that allows them to plan and execute strategic programs both in election and non-election years. That funding is what will allow them to update their processes and equipment, bring on necessary staff, and take other measures to ensure that they are prepared for a flood of last-minute requests or other unexpected situations.

Cobb County Election Director Tate Fall acknowledged this fact in taking responsibility for what happened in 2024. She told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that she aims to “completely rebuild our process to ensure this doesn’t happen again.” One element of that rebuild, she suggested, could involve assembling a call center for future elections to ensure that staff are not pulled away from their work to process absentee

ballot applications—particularly around the deadline.⁶³ **That could cost the county an estimated \$17,000. Replacing the broken printer would cost an estimated \$10,000 more.**

The approximately \$27,000 needed to make those changes represents a fraction of the estimated \$220,000 spent expediting printing and shipping absentee ballots.

Investing ahead of time would have saved the county and its taxpayers a significant amount of money.

On top of the savings, such investments yield results that go far beyond the dollars and cents. They improve voters’ experience of the process by ensuring that they have their ballots on time and that they have trained help to turn to when they have questions. At a time when voters’ trust in the election process is low, working to ensure that they have a seamless experience casting their ballots is critical to restoring that trust and therefore maintaining integrity in our system.

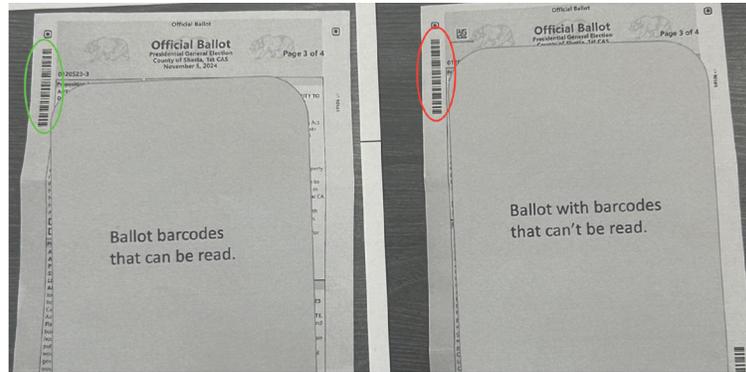
REPRINTING BALLOTS IS AN UNFORTUNATE AND EXPENSIVE REALITY OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

While not all counties can relate to Cobb County’s last-minute rush of absentee ballot requests, printing—and reprinting—issues are all too common. Those issues typically stem from three sources: vendor mistakes, last-minute candidate changes, and human error.

With many jurisdictions serving hundreds of thousands of voters, the most efficient way to print ballots is to contract with a vendor. Errors made by vendors can mean that those ballots are incorrect before election staff have a chance to see them.

62 “Priority Mail Express Information”, USPS, Accessed Fall 2024

63 Thad Moore, “Cobb County spent more than \$200,000 to deliver tardy absentee ballots to voters”, The Atlantic Journal-Constitution, November 27, 2024



Shasta County officials provided a handout demonstrating how ink overspray affected some of their ballots. While difficult to see with the naked eye, the difference had a serious impact on ballot processing for the counties. [Shasta Scout](#).

In **St. Clair County, Alabama**, a printing vendor mistakenly left proposed statewide and local amendments off of 28,800 ballots.⁶⁴ **Reprinting those ballots would cost an estimated \$55,000.**

An “ink overspray” issue made the bar codes on some ballots in **California’s Nevada⁶⁵ and Shasta⁶⁶ Counties** unreadable by tabulation machines, requiring staff to go through additional processing to count the vote.

Sometimes, election administration challenges can be traced back to human error. That was the case in **Carson City, Nevada**, where election officials mistakenly identified U.S. House candidate Lynn Chapman as a Democrat rather than a member of the Independent American Party on its original ballots.⁶⁷ **Reprinting and mailing ballots likely cost approximately \$140,000.**

Finally, changes entirely outside of the printing process can still create the need for ballot reprints. One high-profile example was the need for **North Carolina** jurisdictions to reprint ballots after the State Supreme Court ruled that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.’s name needed to be removed from ballots in the state following his exit from the presidential race. **Replacing the printed forms likely cost the state \$250,000.**

The need to reprint some ballots will likely plague future election cycles. There will always be human error, whether that occurs by elections officials or their vendors. We will continue to see candidates drop out of, or get disqualified from, contests after forms have been inked.

⁶⁴ Riley Conlon, “St. Clair County voters deal with long lines, confusion over misprinted ballots”, WVTV News, November 5, 2024

⁶⁵ Kayla Moeller, “Printing error affects Nevada County vote-by-mail ballots”, CBS New, October 24, 2024

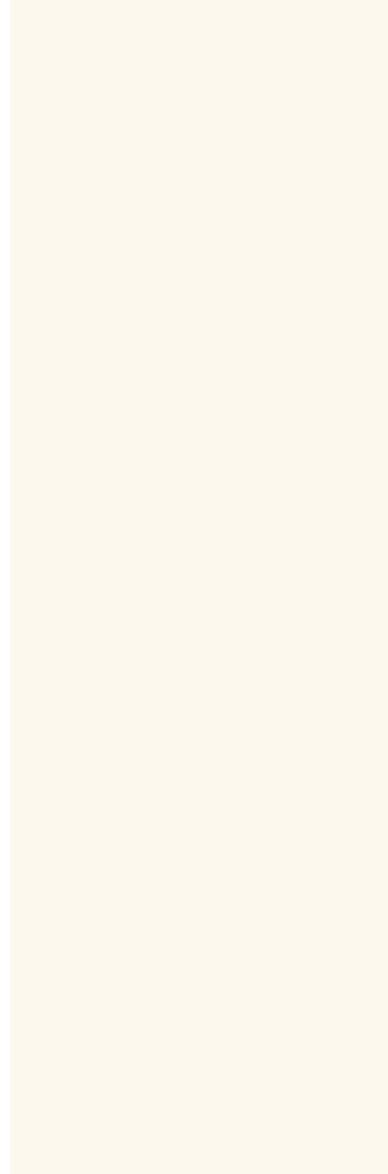
⁶⁶ Annelise Pierce, “Ink Overspray Issue Prompts Change to Ballot Processing Procedure, Shasta Elections Official Announces”, Shasta Scout, October 30, 2024

⁶⁷ Mark Robison, “Carson City voters get ballots with mistake. Replacements to be sent next week.”, Reno Gazette Journal, October 8, 2024

At the same time, fully funding elections departments can help to reduce the need for costly reprints and bring down overall printing costs.

Too often, paper-thin budgets require jurisdictions to choose the printing vendor that submits the lowest bid regardless of that vendor's track record. Staffing is also an important consideration; when someone is working too fast or multitasking, they are more likely to make mistakes.

Robust funding would allow elections offices to select high-quality vendors. It would also allow them to create an environment where staff can devote their full attention to the task at hand while working within a process that includes multiple built-in accuracy check points. **Such investments would yield efficiencies and additional benefits that the \$940,000 spent on ballot reprints in 2024 did not produce.**



NATURAL DISASTERS FORCE CHANGES ON ELECTIONS OFFICIALS, VOTERS

Just days before the 2012 presidential election, Superstorm Sandy struck the East Coast. The severity and unexpected nature of the disaster sent a message to election officials in New Jersey and beyond. In the immediate aftermath⁶⁸—and ever since—state and local election officials have worked to better coordinate preparations for and responses to natural disasters.

But no amount of preparation by county and municipal officials can turn the path of a hurricane, contain rainstorms, or extinguish wildfires. Nor does contingency planning alone provide election offices with the resources to defend against such disasters or

navigate wider destruction of life and property. Ensuring that American elections remain safe, secure, and accessible as the extent and cost of natural disasters continue to increase will require a robust and sustained investment of public dollars in the infrastructure of our democracy.

HURRICANES HELENE, MILTON CUT SWATHES OF DESTRUCTION IN FLORIDA

Natural disasters have predictably unpredictable effects on election administration. Most notably, **election officials in Florida** are well



*Victory Baptist Church, a temporary polling place in **Tampa, Florida** during the 2024 presidential election, had plastic covered windows due to damage from Hurricanes Helene & Milton. [Crist](#).*

⁶⁸ "State Laws & Practices for the Emergency Management of Elections", National Association of Secretaries of State, Accessed Fall 2024

aware that hurricanes will strike the state, but have no way of knowing when or where, and have limited capacities to guard against all the damage that a massive storm can cause.

Hurricane Helene interfered with **Florida's** final days of voter registration, while also damaging absentee ballots and mail boxes. Less than three weeks later, Hurricane Milton's record-breaking storm surge flooded polling locations, forcing polling place closures and consolidations during early voting and on election day.

In **Manatee County** alone, there were five polling locations shuttered by the storm.⁶⁹ Voters frequently struggled to find the correct voting location after their regular polling places were damaged or destroyed, sometimes necessitating costly detours or trips to multiple incorrect locations as incorrect information about where to vote filtered through communities.⁷⁰

Election officials did their best with limited resources to get the word out about changes forced by the storms. In **Sarasota County**, where seven polling places had to be moved, the supervisor of elections mailed out approximately 25,000 polling place change notices to voters.⁷¹ **Doing so cost an estimated \$25,000. If other hurricane-affected counties in Florida had followed suit, it would have cost those counties an additional \$160,000.**

NORTH CAROLINA BEARS THE BRUNT OF HURRICANE HELENE

The effects of Hurricane Helene on states farther up the eastern seaboard were less predictable and far more devastating. In North Carolina in particular, Helene caused unprecedented devastation far inland, washing out entire towns as well as roads,



The North Fork Voting House in Creston, North Carolina was destroyed by Hurricane Helene. "It was not a beautiful place. It was kind of one of those funny little places that you celebrate and love," Patricia Beaver, a nearby resident told ABC News. [Ashe County Board of Elections via ABC News.](#)

69 Jesse Mendoza, "More than 100,000 Manatee County voters have cast ballots in the general election", Sarasota Herald-Tribune, October 28, 2024

70 Teirstein, Horn-Muller, Myers, "What Election Day looked like for voters in hurricane-battered communities across Florida and North Carolina", Crist, November 5, 2024

71 "Sarasota County: Check to see if your Election Day polling location has changed", ABC7, October 31, 2024

bridges, and electrical infrastructure. As local officials worked with federal and state partners to save lives and restore basic services, they were also scrambling to reestablish voting locations.

In many counties in the state's mountainous west, the buildings intended to house early voting sites had been entirely destroyed.⁷² In others, civic buildings like community centers and fire stations that were regularly used for early or election day voting were being used as crisis shelters or search and rescue staging areas.⁷³

"Some sites have been damaged. Some are being used as shelters. Some are completely isolated," **Henderson County Elections Specialist Aaron Troutman** told *ABC News*.⁷⁴

"There are some of them that don't even exist anymore," said Yancey County Election Director Mary Beth Tipton.⁷⁵

According to **Hillsborough County Elections Supervisor Craig Latimer**, "One of them had five feet of water in it."⁷⁶

Finding voting sites that were not too damaged, had sufficient space to set up voting equipment, and had adequate power to run



Voters cast their ballots on Election Day, 2024 in a **Black Mountain, North Carolina** temporary voting site. Hurricane Helene rendered many polling places unusable, requiring election officials to find other options. [Reuters](#).

⁷² Charlambous, Levine, Romero, "After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters." *ABC News*; October 16, 2024.

⁷³ Makiya Seminera, "A hurricane's historic destruction hasn't stopped North Carolina election workers and voters." *AP News*; October 23, 2024.

⁷⁴ Charlambous, Levine, Romero, "After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters." *ABC News*; October 16, 2024.

⁷⁵ Charlambous, Levine, Romero, "After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters." *ABC News*; October 16, 2024.

⁷⁶ Charlambous, Levine, Romero, "After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters." *ABC News*; October 16, 2024.

that equipment was a difficult task. In addition, with bridges and roads out throughout the region, election officials struggled to access more rural populations, and election workers struggled to reach their work sites. Despite the devastation, only four of the 80 early voting sites in the affected region were unable to open, though 14 election day polling places in **Buncombe County**, one of the hardest hit areas, were moved to alternative locations.⁷⁷ **The cost of making those moves and notifying the public is estimated at \$83,000.**

In response to the damage caused by Hurricane Helene, the **North Carolina state legislature allocated \$5 million in emergency funding** to “hire temporary elections staff, deploy mobile voting units, equipment and supplies, train new poll workers or precinct officials, communicate with voters through mailed notices of election changes, re-print absentee ballots, buy emergency communications systems for counties and ensure access to technology and internet connectivity.”⁷⁸

While this allocation was a critical investment to get elections back online, the need likely far outstrips that figure. Simply setting up **three additional early voting sites in Henderson and McDowell counties, as was required by an additional hurricane response measure, could have cost upwards of \$2.1 million dollars.**⁷⁹

Relocating other polling places, activating emergency plans and allocating reserve equipment, increasing and replacing staff, reprinting and re-mailing lost absentee ballots, and providing power to emergency voting sites were all expensive undertakings for the **election officials of North Carolina.** And those costs don’t begin to address

restoring damaged election infrastructure and increasing the resilience of that which survived.

Based on publicly available data sources and estimates derived from previous disasters, we estimate that the restoration and recovery of election services in counties affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton would cost approximately \$120 million.

ELECTION DAY STORMS IN MISSOURI TOOK LIVES, IMPACTED ADMINISTRATION

Natural disasters do not need to cause billions in damage to damage election infrastructure, threaten voter access, and cause unexpected financial costs to election officials.

A series of devastating storms just before and on election day disrupted voter access to the polls and the ability of election officials to open and operate polling places across the center of the country. The most damage was done in **Missouri**, where 6 to 10 inches of rainfall flooded polling places, washed out roads, and knocked out power.⁸⁰ Tragically, two poll workers in their 70s were killed trying to navigate rising waters early in the morning on election day as they made their way to staff the polls.⁸¹

Floodwaters separated voters from their polling places throughout the day, forcing election officials to scramble to move voting sites, shuffle staff, and activate backup equipment.⁸² In **St. Francois County**, some residents were even advised to evacuate just before election day when a levee threatened to fail.⁸³

77 Iris Seaton, “What to know on 2024 election in Buncombe County post-Helene: absentee ballots, early voting,” Asheville Citizen Times; October 15, 2024.

78 Sarah Michels, “NC legislators commit \$5 million to emergency election measures,” Carolina Public Press; October 9, 2024.

79 Based on costs to set up mobile voter units in Maui County, HI following the 2023 wildfires in the state

80 Ruberg, Jiménez, “Flooding in Missouri Kills at Least 5, Including 2 Poll Workers,” New York Times; November 5, 2024.

81 Tasset, Jackson, “Married poll workers drown in flood on way to election site in Missouri,” Fox 2 Now; November 5, 2024.

82 Ruberg, Jiménez, “Flooding in Missouri Kills at Least 5, Including 2 Poll Workers,” New York Times; November 5, 2024.

83 Dominic Genetti, “Missouri voters face challenges heading to polling sites as floods close roads,” The Telegraph; November 5, 2024.

Election officials responded by activating emergency plans to deal with each element of the disaster. In north **St. Louis County**, a power outage at the community center hosting one polling place led to the board of elections running the site off of a generator while also directing voters to alternative polling sites.⁸⁴ Just miles away, a polling place in the southeast of the county flooded and was temporarily closed.⁸⁵ Even after voters made it into polling places, election officials faced disruptions as ballots were rendered unreadable for the machine drop boxes by moisture from voters' drenched jackets. Lines built up inside polling places in **St. Charles County** as voters who had already filled out their ballots waited for them to dry.⁸⁶

ELECTIONS OFFICES NEED MORE FUNDING TO RESPOND TO DISASTERS

While election offices had contingency plans in place to handle many of these and other scenarios, they often lacked the resources to construct an in-depth defense against all the varied threats they could face on election day. Moreover, the infrastructural and societal disruptions inherent in a natural disaster, coupled with the time and legal pressures of running an election, consistently left election officials spending money they did not have and leaning on overburdened staff to make things work.

Despite the considerable disruption caused by natural disasters in 2024, election officials rose to the occasion and put in place fixes to ensure voting could continue. Dedicated federal support would ensure future natural disasters do not endanger the security and integrity of elections and or lives of our election officials.

84 Dominic Genetti, "Missouri voters face challenges heading to polling sites as floods close roads," The Telegraph; November 5, 2024.

85 Smelser, Miltzer, "Flash floods in St. Louis area lead to polling place and road closures," NewsNation; November 5, 2024.

86 Bassler, Krall, "Wet ballots won't go through voting machines in St. Charles. What Now?," KSDK; November 5, 2024.

POLICY CHANGES AND LEGAL CHALLENGES

LAST MINUTE POLICY CHANGES KEEP LEOS ON THEIR TOES

Talk to a local election official and they'll tell you that their job is, first and foremost, to execute each election according to the governing laws and policies. But policy changes made at the 11th hour—and litigation that delays or changes the implementation of those policies—can require a lot of extra work, and sometimes costs.

The back-and-forth legal rulings around the **North Carolina's State Board of Elections** policy to allow UNC students to use the school-issued mobile One digital identification cards to meet state voter ID laws provides one example.⁸⁷ That policy was put in place late in August 2024, less than two months before the start of early voting on October 17.⁸⁸ Preparing to implement this policy required election officials to educate themselves on the newly accepted digital documents and train their staff on how to comply with the policy.

That, however, was not the end of the story. The change was taken to court, and multiple rulings before Election Day held the policy in a state of limbo. On September 19, a **North Carolina** judge upheld the policy.⁸⁹ That ruling was appealed, and on September 27, overturned, meaning that the once-approved digital forms of identification could not be accepted.⁹⁰

Elections departments in **Wisconsin** also faced a late policy change that required them

to adjust their plans for the general election. A July 2024 ruling by the state Supreme Court reversed an early ruling handed down in 2022 that limited where ballot drop boxes could be placed. The change meant that ballot drop boxes could once again be placed throughout communities rather than only in local elections clerks' offices.⁹¹ Again, election officials in many jurisdictions across the state worked to update their plans and communications with the public, with just months to spare before Election Day.

The months leading up to any election are a busy time for all elections staff. They have to recruit and train poll workers, finalize ballots, prepare polling places, and so much more. The confusion spurred from changing policies and legal guidance only added to the work required of affected elections offices.

WYOMING TEST TRIAL DEMONSTRATES POTENTIAL COSTS OF POLICY CHANGES

Any given change to election policy—particularly those made shortly before voting starts—can be difficult to quantify. More often than not, the costs are disguised as increased workloads for elections staff or hidden among other materials costs.

An October 2024 test of hand counting procedures in **Campbell County, Wyoming** provided a rare opportunity to see how policy changes might impact county election budgets.

87 Sarah Michels, "GOP may fight decision letting UNC students use digital ID to vote," Carolina Public Press; August 27, 2024.

88 "Early Voting Period 2024 General Election," North Carolina State Board of Elections; Accessed Fall 2024.

89 Lynn Bonner, "NC judge okays UNC-Chapel Hill's digital IDs as voter identification," NC Newsline; September 20, 2024.

90 Gary D. Robertson, "North Carolina appeals court blocks use of university's digital ID for voting," AP News; September 27, 2024.

91 Todd Richmond, "Wisconsin Supreme Court changes course, will allow expanded use of ballot drop boxes this fall," AP News; July 5, 2024.

Campbell County Clerk Linda Lovelace collaborated with an in-state political action committee that supports the switch from electronic tabulation to hand counting ballots to test the groups' preferred methods.

Forty volunteers assembled to conduct the test. The test involved two trials: one with four teams of four less-experienced counters, and another with a single team of four highly-experienced counters.⁹²

Lovelace used the results of the two trials to estimate the cost of each method assuming 19,735 ballots were cast—the same number the county saw in 2020—and meeting the PAC's suggested requirement that the counting be completed in 4 hours.

She estimated that using less-experienced counters, as was done in the first trial, would require 2,220 staff at a **cost ranging from over \$360,000 to nearly \$1.4 million**, depending on the amount of training the staff received.⁹³ Using a smaller team of highly-trained staff, as was tested in the second trial, would require 608 team members to fully count the vote, **costing anywhere from roughly \$99,000 to \$378,000**, again depending on the hours of training each staff member received.⁹⁴

Neither estimate included reporting or reconciling, as the trial teams did not get that far in the process. That also meant that Lovelace was unable to evaluate the accuracy of the tests.

The **Campbell County Clerk's Office had just under \$393,000 budgeted** for staffing and materials over the course of both the 2024 primary and general elections.⁹⁵ Even if

the county managed to meet the Lovelace's lowest estimate, switching to a hand counting process would eat up a quarter of the county's budget, before accounting for the logistical challenge of recruiting upwards of 600 vote counters, identifying a qualified and effective trainer, and figuring out how many additional election staff would be needed to oversee the process.

"Those are things that would have to be considered if this was to be implemented," Lovelace told the *Gillette News Record*.⁹⁶ "I think it's important for our legislators to know the facts when they're looking at decisions like these that would impact the electoral process," she added in the *Cowboy State Daily*.⁹⁷

To the credit of local elections officials like Lovelace, they carry out their work regardless of their personal opinions about any given policy change. But funding is needed to implement and execute those changes. All too often, such changes end up being unfunded mandates.

ELECTION LITIGATION IS A COSTLY NEW NORM

As was the case with the policy changes in both North Carolina and Wisconsin, litigation led some elections departments to need to adjust the way that they operated. Lawsuits can also require changes before they are ever filed, and can use up precious resources long afterwards.

As the 2024 general election was the most litigated election in history⁹⁸—and the 2020 General was the most litigated election

⁹² Nicky Ouellet, "What Campbell County learned from a test trial hand counting ballots," Wyoming Public Radio; November 4, 2024.

⁹³ "Hand Count Testing Outcome," Campbell County Clerk, Wyoming; October 8, 2024.

⁹⁴ "Hand Count Testing Outcome," Campbell County Clerk, Wyoming; October 8, 2024.

⁹⁵ Jonathan Gallardo, "Counting the cost: Clerk's office estimates hand counting ballots would add \$99K to \$1.38 million in election costs," *Gillette News Record*; October 12, 2024.

⁹⁶ Jonathan Gallardo, "Counting the cost: Clerk's office estimates hand counting ballots would add \$99K to \$1.38 million in election costs," *Gillette News Record*; October 12, 2024.

⁹⁷ Leo Wolfson, "Gillette Hand-Count Ballot Test Shows It Would Take Hundreds Of Counters, Cost Up To \$1.3M," *Cowboy State Daily*; October 9, 2024.

⁹⁸ "2023-2024 Litigation Report: The Most Litigated Election in History," Democracy Docket; December 11, 2024.

before that⁹⁹—it seems that we should expect high numbers of election-related lawsuits to continue to be the norm.

That is not necessarily a bad thing. Providing voters, candidates, and other interested parties with a venue to raise concerns if they believe the election has been administered in an unlawful way is essential to maintaining the integrity of the process, as well as the public's trust in it.

While defending against such lawsuits is not the job of the federal government, it is important to note that these lawsuits put strains on jurisdictional budgets and the capacity of election officials.

South Dakota counties, for example, were dealing with a wave of lawsuits in the weeks leading up to the election. Those included six different legal actions brought against Lawrence County election officials by a candidate for state Senate that lost the June primary by 18 points.

The winning candidate, **state Sen. Rand Deibert (R-Spearfish)** told *South Dakota Searchlight*, “We’re taking property tax dollars. These frivolous lawsuits are part of the problem.”¹⁰⁰

In **Pennsylvania**, the biggest swing state in the country, election and county officials braced for a surge of lawsuits as election day approached. For **Chester County Solicitor Colleen Frens**, that meant holding regular meetings with nearby counties to share information and legal resources. Because election issues were consuming nearly all of the county’s legal resources, she also spent time building relationships with outside lawyers.

“We’re sort of always waiting for the next shoe to drop,” Frens told *ABC News*. “It’s a tremendous use of financial and human resources.”

⁹⁹ Jacob Kovacs-Goodman, “[Post-Election Litigation Analysis and Summaries](#),” Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project; March 10, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Huber, Haiar, “[Counties fending off a storm of election-related lawsuits](#),” *South Dakota Searchlight*; October 18, 2024.

EMERGENCIES DELAY VOTING & ELECTION RESULTS

This report highlights just some of the many ways that unexpected circumstances, ranging from minor snafus to major attacks on election infrastructure, can require additional and often unplanned spending to address. Almost every one of these situations also carries non-financial implications on election administration, particularly long wait times for voters and delays to reporting results.

Staff time is a major contributor to these outcomes, according to feedback received from election officials across the country. At any given time, an election worker can either service voters, communicate with the public or law enforcement, troubleshoot a broken machine, transport ballots, or tabulate votes. Regardless of the amount of experience or training any staff member has, they cannot do multiple things at once.

Previously referenced examples are full of staff time trade-offs. The additional ballot pick ups and drop box monitoring following the ballot box fires in **Clark County, Washington**, took staff away from other duties. An increased number of calls from voters ahead of the absentee ballot request deadline pulled **Cobb County, Georgia**, capacity away from processing applications, contributing to the need to overnight the ballots to voters. The ink overspray issue in **Nevada and Shasta Counties, California**, meant more election workers—and roughly 90 additional county staff¹⁰¹—had to spend more time counting ballots.

On top of these issues, problems with the technology required to conduct elections at scale inevitably emerge. Equipment used throughout the election process broke down in jurisdictions across the country, leading to long lines and delays to results reporting.

PROBLEMS WITH VOTER CHECK-IN TECH CAN CAUSE BIG DELAYS

When voters arrive to vote in person, their first interaction with election staff is often checking in with a poll worker. An increasing number of jurisdictions use electronic poll books, also known as e-poll books, to speed up the process, reduce data entry errors, notify poll workers if a voter has already voted, and produce data on turnout and who voted.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, that equipment occasionally malfunctions. Several problems with e-poll books in 2024 led to delays and long lines of voters. In **Hamilton County, Indiana**, for example, new code led to technical issues that led to wait times of 30 minutes or more.¹⁰³ Further issues with e-poll books also emerged in **Illinois**¹⁰⁴ and **Apache County, Arizona**.¹⁰⁵

One of the most problematic cases of e-poll book issues occurred in **Jefferson County, Kentucky's largest jurisdiction**. When election staff showed up before polls opened at 6 a.m. on November 5 and turned on their devices, the devices locked up and froze. Poll workers had trouble scanning voters' drivers

¹⁰¹ Nevada County Elections Office, "Elections Office Adds Extra Staff to Address Printer's Error on Ballots," YubaNet.com; October 30, 2024.

¹⁰² "Electronic Poll Books," National Council of State Legislatures; June 17, 2024.

¹⁰³ Joe Schroeder, "Complaint filed after polling locations open late in Hamilton County," Fox59 Indianapolis; November 5, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ "At least 2 Illinois polling places report voting system issues, including 1 in Chicago," NBC 5 Chicago; November 5, 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Jessica Johnson, "Navajo Nation sues to extend polling hours on Election Day following Apache County tech issues," Fox 10 Phoenix; November 5, 2024.



At Jeffersontown High School in **Louisville, Kentucky**, hundreds of voters waited over two hours to cast their ballots due to slowdowns from the e-poll book system. [Courier Journal](#).

licenses, and even when they could complete that step, the tablets stalled while pulling up other information such as the voter's address and proof of registration.¹⁰⁶ The problems meant that staff often had to reboot their machines after checking in only five or six people, turning what should have been a 45-second process into one that took three to six minutes.¹⁰⁷ That led to extremely long lines and wait times for voters, some of which reportedly got out of line because they could not wait any longer.¹⁰⁸

The problem appears to have been related to the state's surge in early voting. When poll workers booted up their tablets, the

machines tried to download all the early voting data and overwhelmed the system's WiFi bandwidth.¹⁰⁹ One poll worker remembered minor problems with the equipment during the 2023 gubernatorial primary election, but nothing to the extent that occurred in the 2024 presidential election.¹¹⁰

Following the fiasco, **Jefferson County Clerk Bobbie Holsclaw** planned to meet with her entire staff to figure out a way to avoid a repeat. She told the *Louisville Courier Journal* that changing vendors is "very, very costly," but that she was open to the change if the necessary funds were allocated.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Smith, "What caused voting issues in Louisville on Election Day? And will it happen again?," *Louisville Courier Journal*; November 11, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Rachel Smith, "What caused voting issues in Louisville on Election Day? And will it happen again?," *Louisville Courier Journal*; November 11, 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Rachel Smith, "What caused voting issues in Louisville on Election Day? And will it happen again?," *Louisville Courier Journal*; November 11, 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Marina Johnson, "Election 2024: Early voting is over in Kentucky. Here's how many ballots were cast," *Louisville Courier Journal*; November 4, 2024.

¹¹⁰ Marina Johnson, "Election 2024: Early voting is over in Kentucky. Here's how many ballots were cast," *Louisville Courier Journal*; November 4, 2024.

¹¹¹ Marina Johnson, "Election 2024: Early voting is over in Kentucky. Here's how many ballots were cast," *Louisville Courier Journal*; November 4, 2024.

AGING EQUIPMENT BREAKS DOWN, LEADING TO LONG LINES

While technology such as voting machines and tabulators has helped to speed up the election process, some of it will inevitably break. That is particularly true for older equipment. Research done by Brennan Center for Justice and Verified Voting found that nearly 44.6 million registered voters live in jurisdictions with voting equipment that is more than 10 years old. **Replacing that equipment could cost an estimated \$203 million.**¹¹²

Problems with old voting machines led to long lines for voters on Election Day in **Tulsa County, Oklahoma**. That was the case despite the best-laid plans of local election

officials. "We have a room full of techs, a room full of replacement machines so we either can fix them or we send out a replacement machine," **Tulsa County Election Board Secretary Gwen Freeman** told *FOX23 News*.¹¹³ While she said that, "small elections, big elections—these things happen all the time," she also said that the fact that the machines are getting older makes them even more problematic.¹¹⁴ According to Verified Voting, the election day equipment used in Oklahoma in November 2024 was first fielded in 2012.¹¹⁵

Equipment used to scan ballots after they are filled out led to problems for 12 polling places in Story County, Iowa. "We don't know why," **Story County Auditor Lucy Martin** told the *Ames Tribune*. "The ballots were tested. The machines were tested." Whatever the reason, election officials had to hand count those



Voted mail-in ballots are securely stored in the Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Elections Division warehouse in October 2024. [WESA](#).

¹¹² Edlin, Maier, Stewart, "Costs for Replacing Voting Equipment in 2024," Brennan Center; February 7, 2024.

¹¹³ Video: *FOX23 Investigates: Voters complain of problems at south Tulsa polling place on Election Day (Part 2) | News*, Fox23 News; November 5, 2024.

¹¹⁴ "Video: *FOX23 Investigates: Voters complain of problems at south Tulsa polling place on Election Day (Part 2) | News*," Fox23 News; November 5, 2024.

¹¹⁵ "Verifier Project - Oklahoma," Verified Voting; Accessed Fall 2024.

ballots after the polls closed.¹¹⁶ The county released its Election Summary Report nine days after Election Day,¹¹⁷ two days later than it had in 2020.¹¹⁸

Clackamas County, Oregon ran into mechanical issues with their mail-in ballot sorting machine. That machine serves two purposes: verifying that the envelope in which the ballot was sent is valid by scanning a barcode, and taking a picture of the voter's signature, which staff later review to confirm that it matches the signature on file.¹¹⁹

That required sworn election staff to use hand scanners to sort the ballots, pulling those staff from other work. It also delayed voters' ability to look up the status of their voted ballots,¹²⁰ which likely led to more voters calling into the office to confirm receipt, again causing more work for the office. The ballot sorting issues were, unfortunately, a repeat of a problem that the county faced in 2022.¹²¹

As mentioned, it is hard to quantify all of the trade-offs that come emerge when voting equipment breaks down. **But the 19 reports of broken equipment for which we could estimate a cost tallied up to more than \$3.9 million in expenses for the affected jurisdictions.**

LONG LINES CREATE CROWDS. CROWDS CREATE VULNERABILITY TO ATTACK.

On top of long lines' potential dampening effects on voter turnout, the crowds of waiting voters that develop outside of polling

places can represent a potential vector for attack. The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency notes that, "Public gatherings are increasingly vulnerable to violent attacks and criminal activity because of their relative accessibility and large number of potential targets."¹²²

One particularly horrific plot was thankfully deterred by law enforcement in **Oklahoma** this cycle. An Afghan national in contact with ISIS was plotting an attack before being thwarted by the FBI in October. The Oklahoma resident was accused of plans to purchase two AK-47s and ammunition to conduct a mass shooting attack on Election Day.¹²³ While never successful, this planned act of terrorism demonstrates the importance of both robust coordination with local law enforcement, and ensuring secure voting locations.

Guaranteeing the safety of voters and election administrators is critical to conducting free and fair elections. In addition to continued collaboration with federal and local law enforcement, election officials need to be able to fortify election facilities from in-person attacks and conduct crowd control during early voting and on Election Day.

Preventing long lines from forming, thereby reducing the size of crowds inside and outside of polling places, is also an important way to mitigate risk. That requires a sufficient number of polling places that have enough staff and the right equipment to minimize the amount of time it takes to cast a ballot.

A heartening example of how investment can enhance threat mitigation came in the

¹¹⁶ Tyler Jett, "Story County hand-counts ballots at about a dozen polling places after machine failure," Des Moines Register, November 7, 2024.

¹¹⁷ "Election Summary Report," Story County, Iowa; November 13, 2024.

¹¹⁸ "Election Summary Report," Story County, Iowa; November 9, 2020.

¹¹⁹ "Persistent mail ballot sorter mechanical issues cause delay in ballot processing at Clackamas County Elections," Clackamas County; October 31, 2024.

¹²⁰ "Persistent mail ballot sorter mechanical issues cause delay in ballot processing at Clackamas County Elections," Clackamas County; October 31, 2024.

¹²¹ Lynne Terry, "Clackamas County faces ballot processing backlog following machine breakdowns," Oregon Capital Chronicle; November 1, 2024.

¹²² "Securing Public Gatherings | Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency," CISA; Accessed Fall 2024.

¹²³ Hannah Rabinowitz, "Afghan national charged with Election Day terrorist plot in US," CNN; October 8, 2024.

response to bomb threats made against several **Maryland Board of Elections offices**. Thanks to proper funding, these offices were located in secure locations with limited ingress and egress. They also were equipped with security cameras, footage from which they were able to quickly share with local law enforcement. While evacuations were still necessary, law enforcement was able to rapidly assess the threat and guarantee elections workers safety, allowing them to get back to work.¹²⁴

REDUCING VOTING LINES, REPORTING WAIT TIMES, AND VULNERABILITY TO ATTACK REQUIRES INVESTMENT

Ideally, every voter would be able to quickly and securely cast their ballot and jurisdictions would speedily report their results. In addition to improving voters' experience, this would make elections safer by minimizing vulnerability to attacks. Providing local election offices with sufficient, sustained funding so that they can staff and equip their operations as required would help to achieve this goal.



A line of cars builds up outside of the Oklahoma County Election Board office on the first day of early voting in 2024. The line reportedly stretched about a mile long. [Oklahoma Voice](#).

¹²⁴ Andrew Adeolu, "Several Maryland Board of Election sites evacuated due to bomb threats, police say," CBS News; November 9, 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Election administrators faced a wide range of emergencies in 2024 that required them to pivot, problem-solve, and pay for things that, more often than not, were not planned in their lean budgets.

While we cannot know exactly what emergencies will arise in future cycles, we can and should plan for the predictably unpredictable nature of election administration. Election departments are already doing their best to do so—what is holding them back is a lack of funding.

There are many benefits to providing local election departments with sufficient and sustained funding. Such investment would enable them to:

- Invest in infrastructure and processes that increase resilience against cyber and physical attacks
- Hire staff with the right skillset to inoculate against and respond to lies about the election process, particularly those spread by foreign adversaries
- Continue to increase transparency in the election process
- Update outdated equipment that serves as a vulnerability to foreign malign influence campaigns, can delay the reporting of results, and can lead to long lines, which create additional vulnerabilities to physical attacks
- Choose better, more accurate vendors for printing, equipment, and more, decreasing the need to pay expensive expediting costs and increasing voter trust in the system
- Have backup equipment and materials on hand, reducing the impact of any given breakdown or surge of voting interest
- Hire additional staff to address emerging issues, increase voter support, and add accuracy check points to the process to minimize errors
- Update or move to facilities that are resilient against both natural disasters and physical attack

Each of these efforts would help to increase the integrity, security, safety, and accessibility of our elections system for many cycles to come. And while it would require increased up-front investment, examples examined in this report demonstrate that increased up-front spending is more efficient and more effective long-term than the current model of emergency spending.

State and local governments cannot do this alone. Robust federal funding is critical to provide election jurisdictions across the country with sufficient and sustained investment¹²⁵.

¹²⁵ Gordon, Thorning, Weil, "Reimagining Federal Election Funding," Bipartisan Policy Council, April 18, 2022.

METHODOLOGY

This report estimates emergency spending in the months leading up to and weeks immediately following the 2024 presidential election. The situations in which emergency spending occurred were collected from concurrent news reports from that time period.

Specific costs referenced in news reports were used in our calculation. If those numbers were clearly rounded, overly approximated, or we could find more accurate information, we updated our calculations accordingly.

When specific costs were not cited, we used information provided by the report to do further research. That often included referencing RFPs or invoices to election departments that are public record, public information on county staff salaries, reported voter registration numbers, first-hand accounts reported by election officials, or information from election administration experts. In many cases, we approximated costs based on industry best practices whether or not the report stated that a jurisdiction engaged in a particular response.

Some jurisdiction-level costs were extrapolated to give statewide estimates. Those statewide numbers were only included in the total sums if it was reasonable to assume that the state did or should engage in such a response.

The imminent expenses cost stated in the Introduction consists of two main costs. The first is an estimate of the total cost of recovery and restoration for election departments following Hurricanes Helene and Milton. This amount was a conservative calculation based upon per voter estimates that were derived from comparable events across four categories: facility damage, voting equipment replacement, temporary facilities and expenses, and staffing.

The other estimate included in imminent expenses is the cost to update outdated and unsafe ballot drop boxes across the country.

All estimates that were not directly stated in original reports were rounded to two significant figures.



Ms. SEWELL. I also ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a statement from the League of Women Voters outlining some of the ways that we can best ensure we are prepared for natural disasters and that every voter can cast a ballot.

Chair LEE. Without objection, so ordered.

[The statement referred to follows:]



**Statement for the record, House Administration Subcommittee on Elections Hearing:
“Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters”
September 16, 2025**

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of the United States (the League), thank you for offering the opportunity to discuss the impact of natural disasters on our elections. In the United States, the right to vote is one of the most basic promises of our democracy. Protecting the right to vote for all is a constant endeavor that requires our nation to assess and address any barriers for eligible voters to cast a ballot and have it counted.

The League is a 105-year-old nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to ensure that everyone is represented in our democracy. Founded following the ratification of the 19th Amendment, the League began its work helping newly enfranchised women cast their ballots. We are a grassroots organization comprised of over one million members and supporters in all 50 states and DC, with more than 750 local and state Leagues. The League is nonpartisan — neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government — and is committed to protecting the freedom to vote. The League uses advocacy, education, litigation, and organizing to achieve our mission to empower voters and defend democracy. We base our work on policy positions developed through consensus by League membership to ensure our advocacy reflects best practices and a nationwide perspective.

When natural disasters happen, all parts of a community are impacted, including voting. Unfortunately, voting is often the last thing on the minds of officials following a natural disaster. While officials should focus on the basic survival of their citizens, we must also focus on the importance of civic participation. It is imperative that our electoral system has an existing structure in place to be prepared for the disruptions caused in the voter registration and ballot casting processes before a natural disaster strikes. Every citizen deserves to have their voice heard, and no one should lose that opportunity because they are a victim of a natural disaster.

When disasters cause damage to our communities, families may lose important documentation to register to vote or be prevented from going to their local board of elections to register by the voter registration deadline. If roads are blocked, homes destroyed, power lost, access to internet and cell service disrupted, or government buildings closed when a voter registration deadline passes, many voters — who are already going through the traumatic process of rebuilding their lives — will be prevented from registering in time. It’s times like these that the League steps up to assist voters to find the information they need to exercise the right to vote, ensure that state and local elections officials can serve their local populations, and look for ways to remove any outstanding barriers they may be facing together. Some of the reforms that are needed to ensure natural disaster preparedness include:



- **Extending voter registration timelines:** While the League works all year long to ensure that people are registered to vote, there are always reasons that voters might need to register or update their registration at the last minute due to changes of address, and even newly eligible registrants. It is unfortunately common for voters to miss registration and ballot submission deadlines following natural disasters. Widespread flooding, damaged roadways, power and internet outages, the closure of county board of election offices, and even disruptions to power and internet can get in the way of ensuring that a voter can register to vote. In some cases, courts have extended deadlines to allow voters the necessary time to register or vote, but it is not a given. The League is no stranger to asking boards of elections to extend voter registration deadlines in times of disaster. In 2016, Hurricane Matthew made landfall in Florida, 4 days prior to the voter registration deadline. The League worked to advocate for an extension of the deadline with state officials and ultimately filed a lawsuit in federal court to have the deadline extended. At the time, statistics showed that up to 20% of all new registrants in Florida were received in the week before the registration deadline.¹ When the ability to collect voter registrations by the appropriate government agencies is disrupted, that hurts voters wishing to register and cast a ballot. To minimize this, the extension of voter registration deadlines is a minimal change needed.
- **Extending early voting and absentee voting:** Vital services can be affected following a natural disaster. This includes disruption of mail services, impacts to vital public resources like libraries, and impacts to power and utility services. When the mail is disrupted, this may affect how absentee ballots are able to be returned. For voters who have already requested a ballot be mailed to them or may have them in hand, this means ensuring that their ballots can be accepted by a postmarked date, allowing them to be dropped off at Election Day polling locations, or allowing voters to cast a ballot at an early voting site. Early voting can allow voters to ensure their vote is cast. Early voting during seasons prone to natural disasters should consider the addition of early voting sites, extension of hours and days that early voting can occur, and ensuring the flexibility to remove early voting sites that may have been adversely affected by the disaster event. In 2024, Hurricane Helene devastated many counties across North Carolina. The NC State Board of Elections addressed the needs of its counties, including clarifying the actions that county boards of elections could take to ensure early voting and absentee ballots were accessible to the affected individuals.²
- **Dedicated funding to strengthen plans during natural and climate-related crises:** Voters deserve the opportunity to cast a ballot no matter the state of their surroundings. Whether it's flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, or other impacts of disasters, elections officials need to have plans in place to protect the right to vote. Congress should offer dedicated funding that allows elections officials to have contingency plans in place. It is crucial that we have robust plans in place in advance of a

¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/after-hurricane-league-women-voters-asks-judge-extend-floridas-voter>

² https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-10-07/20241007%20Emergency%20Resolution%20for%2013%20WNC%20Counties_Final_Signed.pdf?inline=1



natural disaster that allow voters the time needed to register and vote when our communities experience catastrophic weather events beyond our control. Congress can provide a grant to do this through the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), as they have done with previous funding granted under the *Help America Vote Act*.

Instituting same-day voter registration: In order to avoid voters missing registration deadlines, states can institute same-day or Election Day voter registration. This allows eligible voters to register to vote during the early voting period or on Election Day and cast a regular ballot. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia already allow voters to register on Election Day. There is evidence that same-day voter registration increases turnout in elections, protects Americans who fall through the registration cracks, and offers an important avenue for more voters to participate. Same-day registration ensures that the largest number of Americans can exercise their right to vote. This is even more important when voters are facing the effects of natural disasters.³

Increased accessibility to the electoral process is integral to ensuring that every eligible voter can exercise their right to vote in both normal circumstances and times of crisis. Voting is a fundamental right, and all Americans deserve an equal opportunity to make their voices heard in our democracy, including – and especially – when natural disasters strike.

We look forward to being a resource to ensure accessibility for all eligible voters to the ballot box. Please do not hesitate to contact our staff via Jessica Jones Capparell, Director of Government Affairs, at JJones@lwv.org, or Kristen Kern, Federal Policy and Advocacy Manager, at KKern@lwv.org.

³ https://www.pew.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2009/uwisconsin1.pdf

Ms. SEWELL. Thank you.
 [The prepared statement of Ranking Member Sewell follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER OF THE
 SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS TERRI A. SEWELL**

As the Ranking Member of the Elections Subcommittee and the Representative of Alabama's Civil Rights District, there is nothing more important to me than ensuring that every eligible voter is able to cast their ballot and have their voices heard.

I am glad that today we are focusing on the impact of natural disasters on election operations, because my district is under the constant threat of natural disasters. Since 1980, Alabama has experienced 102 Federal disaster declarations. Every year, tornadoes devastate communities I represent, from the April 27th, 2021, tornado that claimed the lives of 64 Alabamians to the January 2023 storm that devastated my hometown of Selma.

Every Member of Congress who has experienced a community impacted by a natural disaster knows that extensive coordination between local, State, and Federal partners is required to restore basic services and infrastructure to the people impacted by these events. Our election administrators are not immune to these disruptions. Natural disasters can damage or destroy polling stations, voting machines, ballots, or other infrastructure such as the power or delivery of the mail. They can damage or destroy people's homes and belongings, including documents needed to meet voter ID requirements.

Moreover, storms do not care if we are 6 months, 6 weeks, or 6 days away from an election; election officials and Federal partners must be prepared for all scenarios so that they can ensure that voters are able to cast their ballots. In the past, severe weather events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires had more defined seasons, but we have seen that these seasons are lengthening. Regardless of when a disaster hits, a community recovery from disaster and destruction can take weeks, months, and, I can tell you, even years. Voters in Alabama and across the country deserve to know that we are prepared to manage the impact of these events and that we have plans in place to protect their access to the ballot box.

As Members of Congress, we should be working overtime to ensure that election officials have the resources they need to administer elections and that every voter has a fair opportunity to cast their ballot. Voting must be resilient, even in the face of crisis.

I cannot ignore the fact that we are holding a hearing to discuss the impact of natural disasters on election administration when the Trump administration is proposing to make major cuts to FEMA, undermining climate science and halting climate research at every turn. The President's reckless cuts to vital services like FEMA will increase the burden for States as they try to recover from recent disasters and try to plan for the future. Sadly, congressional Republicans are standing by silently as President Trump fires staff, cuts funding, and rescinds grants from these critical programs.

I am looking forward to our discussion today, because we need to take a hard look at how Republicans' cuts will hurt our disaster preparedness and place new burdens on our election officials. If we are going to have a candid discussion, the Federal Government must be an equal and good faith partner in that endeavor.

Denying climate science, cutting recovery personnel and resources, spreading misinformation and disinformation, and threatening to withhold resources from the President's political opponents does not help election officials, voters, or the security of our elections. We must address the chronic underfunding of our elections. It is simple as that. We must be proactive as we think about ways to implement policies that not only expand access to the ballot box for every eligible voter but ensures that our election infrastructure is resilient and does not crumble in the face of a natural disaster.

When the next disaster strikes—and it will—it is the American people who will suffer from the lack of preparation and resources. We will not forget this administration's efforts to make it harder for Americans to vote and reducing the few resources that we currently have for election administrators. The American people's right to vote is sacred, and I know that I will continue to work tirelessly with my colleagues across the aisle to make sure that we have adequate funding and that every eligible voter has a right to vote.

Chair LEE. Without objection, all other Members' opening statements will be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Committee clerk by 5 p.m. today.

Today, we have one witness panel. I will now introduce our witnesses.

First, we have "Four" Eggers, partner at Eggers, Eggers, Eggers, & Eggers, PLLC, and current secretary of the North Carolina State Board of Elections.

Next, we have Cord Byrd, the Secretary of State of the great State of Florida.

Finally, we have Karen Brinson Bell, the former executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections.

Each witness will have 5 minutes to provide an opening statement.

I now recognize Mr. Eggers for the purpose of giving his opening statement.

STATEMENTS OF STACY "FOUR" EGGERS, IV, PARTNER, EGGERS, EGGERS, EGGERS, & EGGERS, PLLC; THE HONORABLE CORD BYRD, SECRETARY OF STATE OF FLORIDA, OFFICE OF THE FLORIDA SECRETARY OF STATE; AND KAREN BRINSON BELL, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

STATEMENT OF STACY "FOUR" EGGERS, IV

Mr. EGGERS. Thank you, Chair Lee and Ranking Members Morelle and Sewell, for the opportunity to address your Committee.

Between September 25th and 28th of last year, Tropical Storm Helene inundated western North Carolina, receiving an unprecedented amount of rainfall, consistent with a 1,000-year storm.

This level of rainfall, coupled with the power of gravity, caused mountain streams, creeks, and rivers to become overwhelmed, with the speed and force of water tearing out culverts, bridges, power lines, telecommunication lines, water lines, and sewer lines. Mudslides and downed trees added to the difficulties in travel and basic emergency response services.

Power and telecommunication systems were simply not functional, and local radio stations were off the air because they were dependent upon fiber-optic lines that no longer existed. There was no internet service nor cell phone service through much of the region. State roads in the area had more than 9,000 damage sites and more than 1,400 road closures as a result of the storm.

This storm left us 38 days until Election Day and 21 days before early voting was to begin for the North Carolina Presidential election.

In the 25-county disaster area, 10 of our county offices were closed for extended periods of time due to lack of electrical, telecommunication, internet, power, and water service.

Thankfully, we were able to account for all of our county election staff, and quickly took inventory of the damages and needs for those offices.

I will start by first thanking our dedicated county elections directors, the election staff, and poll workers for their outstanding serv-

ice and dedication in making sure our elections are accessible and fair. These are the keys to our success related to this.

Second, one of those keys is the bipartisan nature of how my colleagues on the State Board of Elections and the respective county boards came together to take emergency action that addressed the needs of the voters with minimal political gamesmanship.

On September 30th of 2024, we were able to issue a bipartisan and unanimous emergency directive to allow for flexibility in conducting absentee ballot meetings in the affected areas.

On November 7th—or, I am sorry, on October 7th of 2024, we also issued a bipartisan and unanimous emergency directive to address the 13 most affected counties, allowing for changes by those county boards of election so long as they were adopted by a bipartisan vote.

These emergency actions provided flexibility for the counties to adopt—again, on that bipartisan basis—changes to meet the realities for voting in the wake of this unprecedented storm.

At the end of the day, this turns out to be an incredible success story for our State, as turnout in western North Carolina was actually higher than the rest of the State.

I would caution that this higher voter turnout is not because of our emergency changes alone. Credit for the higher turnout belongs to the voters themselves and the civic pride and sense of community that Americans bring to recovery from tragedy and natural disasters.

I would also caution that these changes are not best practices for the administration of elections. During normal conditions, we need adequate checks and balances to make it easy to vote yet hard to cheat. These changes were narrowly tailored to reflect the difficult realities of recovery from the worst natural disaster to strike western North Carolina in living memory.

Of the lessons learned related to the natural disaster, I would say, first, preparation is the key to a successful election.

Second, any last-minute changes to the settled rules and deadlines for an election should have bipartisan support.

Third, delaying or suspending elections is simply not an option for members and administrators of elections. Regardless of the disaster, people expect and demand elections to occur on time. Postponing elections would be absolutely the last choice, as it would cause rumors, chaos, and suspicion in an area with already weakened public safety and communication resources.

It is an honor to be able to speak with you today, and I am grateful for your service and involvement with this important topic.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Eggers follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STACY “FOUR” EGGERS, IVTestimony of Stacy Eggers, IVSubcommittee Hearing on Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters – June 10, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. Between September 25-28 of last year, Tropical Storm Helene inundated western North Carolina, receiving an unprecedented amount of rainfall consistent with a thousand year storm. This level of rainfall, coupled with the power of gravity, caused mountain streams, creeks, and rivers to become overwhelmed, with the speed and force of the water tearing out culverts, bridges, power lines, telecommunication lines, water lines and sewer lines. Mudslides and downed trees added to the difficulties in travel and basic emergency response services.

Power and telecommunication systems were not functional, and local radio stations were off the air because they depended upon fiber optic lines that no longer existed. There was no internet service or cell phone service. State roads in the region had more than 9,000 damage sites and more than 1,400 road closures. Thirty-six hours into the storm, emergency responder portable radios failed because tower batteries were drained and microwave antennas were blown off inaccessible communication towers.

Immediately following the storm, citizens with chainsaws and any equipment they had took to the streets to begin clearing what debris they could; private grading contractors took it upon themselves to begin fixing main roads once the water subsided. In certain counties, it took more than seven days before limited power was restored to county offices by generators, and

twelve days before electricity was restored to a county seat. To this day, there are still road closures and residuary flooding resulting from the storm.

In Elections, two days prior to the storm North Carolina had already begun distributing Absentee Ballots by mail – with more than 200,000 ballots already in the mail. This was obviously a problem because roads were impassable, post offices were inaccessible, and mailboxes in many areas were non-existent.

This storm left us 38 days until Election Day, and 21 days before Early Voting was to begin in North Carolina for the Presidential Election. In the 25 county disaster area, 10 of our county offices were closed for extended periods of time due to lack of electricity, telecommunications, internet, power, and/or water. Thankfully, we were able to account for all of the county elections staff, and took inventory of the damages and needs of those offices.

We then set about taking an inventory of polling locations and early voting sites. Some counties, such as Buncombe County, with over 200,000 voters, lost twenty percent of their voting locations due to storm damage. While this was a natural disaster of epic proportions, this is a success story.

First, I must thank the dedicated county elections directors, the elections staff, and poll workers for their outstanding service and dedication to making sure our elections were accessible and fair.

Second, the key to our success was the bi-partisan nature of how my colleagues on the State Board of Elections and the respective county boards

came together to take emergency actions that addressed the needs of the voters with minimal political gamesmanship.

On September 30, 2024, we issued a bi-partisan and unanimous emergency directive to allow for flexibility in conducting absentee ballot meetings of the County Boards in each of the 25 affected counties prior to the election.

On October 7, 2024, we issued a bi-partisan and unanimous emergency directive to address concerns in the 13 most affected counties allowing for changes by the County Boards of Election -- so long as they were adopted by a bi-partisan vote. These emergency actions provided flexibility for counties boards to adopt, on a bi-partisan basis, changes to meet the realities of voting in the wake of this unprecedented natural disaster. A copy of these Resolutions are attached to these remarks.

This is a success story because voter turnout in western North Carolina was actually higher than the rest of the State. I would caution that this higher voter turnout is not because of our emergency changes. Credit for the higher turnout belongs to the voters themselves, and the civic pride and sense of community that Americans bring to recovery from tragedy and natural disasters. I would also caution that these changes are NOT best practices for administering Elections. During normal conditions, we need adequate checks and balances to make it easy to vote yet hard to cheat. These changes were narrowly tailored to reflect the difficult realities of recovery from the worst natural disaster to strike western North Carolina in living memory.

There are several lessons learned in dealing with elections during natural disasters.

First, Preparation is the key to a successful election. This means making sure voting sites are available to voters and where they expect them to be. Consistency builds confidence in elections, and getting as close to the expected polling locations as possible is key to election administration in periods of natural disaster.

For Logistics, elections need direct access to Emergency Management. Having a dedicated National Guard contact for procurement of needed supplies and materials was critical to our success. Preferably, having direct elections communications to the FAA to address 'no-fly zone' restrictions in the congested airspace over the disaster site would help coordinate delivery of needed supplies for elections. In 2017 elections were deemed "Critical Infrastructure" by the Department of Homeland Security and this would improve the delivery of elections during natural disasters.

Second, any last minute changes to the settled rules and deadlines for an election should have bipartisan support. Running elections during natural disasters requires transparency and buy-in from the major parties involved.

Third, delaying or suspending elections is NOT an option. Regardless of the disaster, people expect and demand elections to occur on time. Even if we have no poll book or access to computer verification, people can still vote. Under a worst case scenario, we can vote with paper, pens, and envelopes, along with a secure container to put ballots in. This would mean every ballot

in a precinct would be cast as a provisional ballot, but those can be reviewed and verified as part of the canvass process. Postponing elections should always be the absolute last choice, as it would cause rumors, chaos, and suspicion in an area with weakened public safety and communication resources.

It is an honor to be able to speak with you today, and I am grateful for your service on this important topic.



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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RESOLUTION REGARDING THE SCHEDULING OF ABSENTEE BOARD MEETINGS FOR THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION IN 25 COUNTIES IDENTIFIED IN THE FEDERAL DISASTER DECLARATION

At an emergency meeting duly called and held on the September 30, 2024, the State Board of Elections ("State Board") adopted the following resolution:

WHEREAS, on September 25, 2024, the Governor of North Carolina issued Executive Order No. 315, declaring a State of Emergency in response to Tropical Storm Helene in anticipation for significant impact and damage to the State of North Carolina.

WHEREAS, on September 28, 2024, the President of the United States issued a Federal Major Disaster Declaration, FEMA-4827-DR, for the State of North Carolina in response to Tropical Storm Helene for 25 counties. The counties in the declaration are Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties.

WHEREAS, N.C.G.S. § 163-27.1 authorizes the State Board to exercise emergency powers to conduct an election where the normal schedule is disrupted by a natural disaster. In exercising those emergency powers, the State Board shall avoid unnecessary conflict with the provisions of Chapter 163.

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 163-27.1, the State Board finds that Tropical Storm Helene has resulted in an unprecedented natural disaster for Western North Carolina that has disrupted and continues to disrupt the schedule of the general election and has impacted and continues to impact the administration of the election in the region. Tropical Storm Helene has severely impacted public and private property and caused serious disruptions to essential utility services and systems to include power, internet, water, and travel.

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 163-230.1(f), beginning on the fifth Tuesday before Election Day, county boards of elections hold public meetings at 5:00 P.M. for the purpose of reviewing and acting upon absentee ballots. For the 2024 General Election, these meetings are scheduled to begin on Tuesday, October 1, 2024. For any variation from the schedule of these meetings, including by scheduling additional meetings, notice of such variation is required to be published in a newspaper circulated in the county at least 30 days prior to the election.

WHEREAS, the State Board finds that the ongoing disaster has inhibited travel and communication in Western North Carolina and has made it impossible for some county boards to comply with the schedule set forth in N.C.G.S. § 163-230.1(f).

WHEREAS, the disruptions from the Tropical Storm Helene have affected and will continue to affect the administration of State and local contests in Western North Carolina and the State for the remainder of the 2024 General Election period. State Board of Elections staff are working with North Carolina Emergency Management and county boards of elections to minimize disruptions and ensure absentee voting can continue.

WHEREAS, a delay in the start of absentee board meetings will not inhibit compliance with any other State or federal deadlines. Current conditions in Western North Carolina are such that attendance by county board members, county staff, and the public at the meetings, as currently scheduled, could risk health and safety and impede disaster recovery efforts. If meetings continue and board members or the public are unable to attend, public confidence in election integrity and ballot security may also be negatively impacted.

THEREFORE, THE STATE BOARD HEREBY RESOLVES THAT:

1. Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the 25 county boards of elections in the federally declared disaster area may reschedule their pre-Election Day absentee ballot meetings, when the normal schedule of those meetings would not be feasible for the members or staff of the county board, as a result of the disaster. Any rescheduled meetings should take place as soon as practicable. These county boards may also schedule additional absentee ballot meetings, if required as a result of the disaster. Notice for any rescheduled or additional meetings shall be provided at least 48 hours prior to the meeting, consistent with G.S. § 143-318.12(b)(2).
2. The State Board shall provide a centralized location on its website with information about the absentee ballot process in the affected counties.

Adopted this the 30th day of September, 2024.



Alan Hirsch, Chair
State Board of Elections



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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**RESOLUTION REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF EARLY
 VOTING, ELECTION DAY VOTING, ABSENTEE VOTING,
 AND VOTER REGISTRATION FOR THE 2024 GENERAL
 ELECTION IN THE 13 COUNTIES MOST AFFECTED BY
 TROPICAL STORM HELENE**

At a meeting duly called and held on October 7, 2024, the State Board of Elections (“State Board”) adopted the following resolution:

WHEREAS, on September 25, 2024, the Governor of North Carolina issued Executive Order No. 315, declaring a State of Emergency in response to Tropical Storm Helene in anticipation of significant impact and damage to the State of North Carolina.

WHEREAS, on September 28, 2024, the President of the United States issued a Federal Major Disaster Declaration, FEMA-4827-DR, for the State of North Carolina in response to Tropical Storm Helene for 25 counties in western North Carolina.

WHEREAS, N.C.G.S. § 163-27.1 authorizes the State Board to exercise emergency powers to conduct an election where the normal schedule is disrupted by a natural disaster. In exercising those emergency powers, the State Board shall avoid unnecessary conflict with the provisions of Chapter 163.

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 163-27.1, the State Board finds that Tropical Storm Helene created an unprecedented natural disaster for Western North Carolina that has disrupted and continues to disrupt the schedule of the general election and has impacted and continues to impact the administration of the election in the region. Tropical Storm Helene has taken many lives, severely damaged public and private property, and caused significant and lasting disruptions to essential utility services and systems to include power, internet, cell service, water, and transportation.

WHEREAS, the State Board finds that the infrastructure for elections administration and voters’ accessibility to polling places and mail service in the following 13 counties remain severely disrupted as a result of the disaster and will continue to be so disrupted throughout the election: **Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey**. These counties report that not all of their scheduled early voting sites or election day voting sites will be available due to damage from the storm, inaccessibility, the site’s current use for disaster response, or the likely unavailability of sufficient staff.

WHEREAS, nearly all of the county board offices in these counties were closed to the public for at least part of the week of September 30 through October 4, 2024, with five of them remaining closed throughout the entire week.

WHEREAS, each of these counties is experiencing multiple road closures—including on highways and interstates—with current estimates of road closures possibly being an undercount due to the inaccessibility of many communities for transportation officials to assess the status of all roads. Additionally, official road closure statistics do not account for breaches on private roads and driveways that also inhibit or prohibit travel for many area residents, and in some cases, elections personnel.

WHEREAS, all of these counties are still experiencing disruptions with the delivery of mail to residences, a disruption that is expected to last as long as roads remain impassable in these counties, although the county board offices for these counties are now able to receive mail and access a functioning post office.

WHEREAS, thousands of customers in each of these counties lacked electrical power as of the end of last week, with hundreds of thousands still without power across the entire region.

WHEREAS, almost all of these counties are currently experiencing water supply outages, and all of these counties have areas with restrictions on water supply use (e.g., boil water advisories). These counties also have large rural populations that rely on private well water, and many of those sources have been contaminated by flooding and/or are inaccessible due to lack of power to pump water.

WHEREAS, cellular service is not reliable throughout these counties, with some areas experiencing total outages and others experiencing only intermittent or weak coverage.

WHEREAS, due to supply, power, and transportation disruptions, gasoline has not been readily available in many areas of this region, with some localities requiring the rationing of fuel.

WHEREAS, public and private agencies have established disaster relief stations throughout these counties, where essential supplies for daily life, especially potable water, are provided to the general public.

WHEREAS, the detrimental impacts to the daily lives of the residents of these counties from this storm damage has already led many area residents to relocate to other parts of the state or outside the state, which will result in increasing demand for absentee voting and the increased use of that voting method by many voters who are not accustomed to voting that way.

WHEREAS, the directors of elections in almost all of these counties expect that some poll workers may no longer be available to work this election due to relocation or the personal demands of the disaster, which will pose a challenge to these county boards' ability to fully staff

all their scheduled voting sites with experienced workers under existing appointments and under existing statutory constraints on poll worker appointment and reassignment.

WHEREAS, many of the staff who administer election functions in these counties are having to simultaneously conduct a presidential election in a disaster zone while also dealing with devastating personal impacts from the storm, with some staff being forced to relocate to other counties and other staff remaining isolated in communities that are inaccessible by road.

WHEREAS, the boards of elections in these counties are now having to work through a backlog of administrative tasks—such as poll worker trainings, voter registration, absentee ballot processing, and machine testing, among others—which they could not complete in the days following the storm, at the same time they must prepare for the start of early voting which is merely a week and a half away, to be followed soon by Election Day voting which itself requires significant advance preparation.

WHEREAS, the State Board finds that the ongoing disaster has significantly disrupted the normal schedule of the election in these 13 counties, particularly with respect to elections office closures, elections staff availability, poll worker availability, early voting and Election Day voting site usability, transportation and mail service impediments, and the significant displacement of voters and election workers. Most of these disruptions will likely persist through the remainder of the 2024 General Election period.

WHEREAS, the State Board finds that emergency administrative measures, which can go into effect immediately upon adoption of this resolution, are required to provide sufficient time for the affected counties to implement emergency measures and to provide notice to the public of any changes to voting sites or other voting procedures.

WHEREAS, the emergency measures identified below directly address the disruptions caused by the disaster in these counties and are needed to ensure all eligible voters have access to the ballot box, which will help promote public confidence in this election. These measures have been carefully crafted to avoid any detrimental effect on the integrity of the election or the security of ballots.

THEREFORE, THE STATE BOARD HEREBY RESOLVES THAT:

1. **Early Voting.** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the boards of elections for the 13 counties identified above are authorized to modify their early voting plans by bipartisan majority vote without a requirement for the State Board to approve those modifications. To approve any such modifications, the county board must make written findings in a resolution that the modifications are required by the effects of the recent disaster and provide a copy of that resolution to the State Board. Such modifications may include:

- a. Changing or adding sites, or removing sites that are unusable. Before removing a site, the county board shall make all feasible attempts to maintain the site's availability.
- b. Adding or reducing days that any site is open within the established early voting period.
- c. Extending or reducing hours that any site is open on any days within the established early voting period.

In modifying the early voting plans, the county board shall seek to minimize, to the extent possible, any reduction in the overall number of hours available for voters to participate in early voting in the county. The uniform days and hours requirements of G.S. § 163-166.35(d) shall not apply strictly to these counties but shall be observed to the greatest extent practicable. In addition to notifying local media of any changes, staff shall make reasonable efforts to post notice of such changes at as many disaster shelters and other places where disaster relief is provided to the general public within the county as possible.

2. **Election Day Polling Places.** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the boards of elections for the counties identified above are authorized to modify their Election Day precinct voting sites by bipartisan majority vote. To approve any such modifications, the county board must make written findings in a resolution that the modifications are required by the effects of the recent disaster and provide a copy of that resolution to the State Board. In making any modifications under this provision, the county board shall strive to maintain voting access as close to existing voting locations as possible and should resort to establishing a voting site outside of a precinct only as a last resort. Such modifications may include:

- a. Transfer voters from a given precinct to another in the county, even if the receiving precinct is not adjacent where no adjacent precinct is available. Approval of the Executive Director of the State Board is required, consistent with G.S. § 163-128. The county board shall ensure that separate tabulators are assigned for voters in one precinct versus another.
- b. Establish out-of-precinct voting places. Such a voting place may be located in another North Carolina county adjacent to the precinct, to be staffed and managed by workers employed by or appointed by the county board establishing the out-of-precinct voting place. Approval of the Executive Director of the State Board is required, consistent with G.S. § 163-130.1. Any polling place established under this provision may be co-located with another precinct's voting location, but the materials, tabulators, and voting processes shall be kept separate for each precinct's voters at that location.

- c. Establish more than one voting location for voters in a given precinct. Such a voting place may be located in another North Carolina county adjacent to the precinct, to be staffed and managed by workers employed by or appointed by the county board establishing the additional voting location. Approval of the Executive Director of the State Board is required, consistent with G.S. § 163-130.2. Any polling place established under this provision may be co-located with another precinct's voting location, but the materials, tabulators, and voting processes shall be kept separate for each precinct's voters at that location.
- d. Allow the central transfer precinct to be used by any county voter on Election Day. If the county codes its ballots by style, the county board shall write the precinct designation on the voter's ballot, to facilitate the post-election precinct sort.

Notice of any modification under this section shall be given to the affected voters by mail, as soon as possible following approval of the modification. The county board shall also cause the notice to be immediately delivered to all local media and the chairs of the county political parties, and shall be posted on the county board's website as soon as possible. Staff shall also make reasonable efforts to post notice of such changes at as many disaster shelters and other places where disaster relief is provided to the general public within the county as possible.

Counties are encouraged to consider what option above is best for the disaster-related needs of the county. For example, co-locating voting locations under b. and c. above may be preferable if the county has sufficient poll workers to staff both precincts at the locations, while a temporary transfer under a. may be preferable in the event of a poll worker shortage.

- 3. **Poll Worker Recruitment and Assignment.** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the boards of elections for the same counties identified above are authorized to do the following, by bipartisan majority vote (unless action by the chair is authorized by statute), to the extent each action is required by the effects of the disaster:
 - a. Appoint election officials for early voting and Election Day voting sites who are registered voters of other North Carolina counties.
 - b. Appoint election officials for Election Day voting sites without regard to the official's precinct of residence.
 - c. If the chair is filling a vacancy in an existing appointment, the chair shall replace the official with someone of the same party to the extent that is possible and must strive to maintain bipartisan representation among the judges at all sites, to the extent possible. As the county board makes Election Day preparations, an election official's failure to return contact or

confirm availability to serve with the county board office constitutes a vacancy for “any other cause” under G.S. § 163-41(d).

- d. Appoint emergency election day assistants and assign them to a precinct.
- e. Reassign poll workers to locations for which they had not been originally designated, to ensure there is sufficient knowledge and experience at each voting site.

County boards may, without needing to take a vote, administer the oath of office to election officials who must be sworn in before Election Day by electronic or telephonic means, and obtain assistance in training poll workers from the State Board staff or from staff of other county boards of elections as may be available to assist.

Notice of any appointments made under this section shall be given to the appointed official by mail and email as soon as possible following the appointment, or may be delivered in person. The county board shall also cause the notice to be immediately delivered to all local media and the chairs of the county political parties, and shall be posted on the county board’s website as soon as possible.

4. **Absentee Ballot Processing.** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the boards of elections for the affected counties identified above shall do the following:
- a. Process an absentee ballot request from a voter or a voter’s near relative or verifiable legal guardian in person at the county board office up until the day before the election, similar to the provision in G.S. § 163-230.1(b). The voter or the voter’s near relative or verifiable legal guardian is still required to complete the absentee request form with the required personal information, and that information must be verified as with any absentee request. But the board may provide the voter or voter’s near relative or verifiable legal guardian with the voter’s absentee ballot envelope at the office location.
 - b. Process a spoil-and-reissue or cure of an absentee ballot from a voter in person at the county board office. A voter’s near relative or verifiable legal guardian may retrieve any reissued ballot package (following a spoilage) or any required cure documentation to take to a voter who is required to cure a deficiency with an absentee ballot. The county board shall maintain a log of such transactions, consistent with the contents of the log maintained for the delivery of absentee ballots.
 - c. Accept the delivery of completed absentee ballots from Election Day voting sites operated by the voter’s county board, as long as those ballots were delivered to the voting site by 7:30 pm on Election Day. Precinct officials shall maintain a log of such ballots and chain-of-custody

documentation, consistent with how early voting officials carry out this task, to be delivered to the county board office when supplies are returned on election night.

- d. Accept the delivery of completed absentee ballots by mail, commercial delivery service, or delivery by a staff member of a county board or State Board if those ballots were delivered to another county board of elections or the State Board, as long as those ballots were delivered to a North Carolina county board of elections or the State Board by 7:30 pm on Election Day and ultimately received by the board of elections for the voter's county by the day before county canvass.

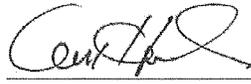
5. **Absentee Voting for Affected Voters.** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, voters registered in the same counties identified above, or their near relatives or verifiable legal guardians, may hand-deliver their completed absentee ballot to another North Carolina county's board of elections office or the State Board office so long as it is received by 7:30 pm on Election Day. The county board office or State Board that receives such an out-of-county absentee ballot shall immediately date-stamp the absentee ballot envelope and shall ensure that the ballots of such voters are delivered to the board of elections office for the voter's county by the day before county canvass, either by trackable mail, commercial delivery service, or delivery by a staff member of the county board or State Board. The State Board or county board receiving the out-of-county ballot shall note the date, time, individual receiving the ballot, and individual delivering the ballot, as well as the affected county to which it will be sent, in a log. On a weekly basis and on Election Night, each receiving county shall report to the State Board the number of ballots received in such a manner for each affected county. If delivery to the voter's county board is made by staff of the county board or State Board, transport of the ballots shall be in a sealed, secure container, with documentation of the chain of custody.

6. **Multipartisan Assistance Teams (MATs).** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the boards of elections for the same counties identified above, by bipartisan majority vote, are authorized to do the following:
- a. Appoint MAT members who are registered voters of other North Carolina counties.
 - b. Appoint MAT members who are unaffiliated or affiliated with a minor political party by bipartisan majority vote, where there are insufficient registered voters to appoint to a MAT from each of the two political parties with the highest number of affiliated voters in the State.
 - c. Schedule MATs to assist with absentee ballot requests and absentee voting at disaster shelters and other places where disaster relief is provided to the general public, to the same extent that MATs are authorized to assist in

covered care facilities. MATs in these counties are also authorized to receive and deliver to the county board of elections the completed absentee ballot envelopes or ballot cure documentation for any voters, regardless of disability, at any site that the MAT is authorized to serve, either under state law or under this resolution. If a MAT member fails to sign the assistance section of the absentee envelope, that is not a ballot application deficiency, as long as the county board can otherwise determine that assistance was provided by the MAT.

7. **Voter Registration and Office Operations.** Pursuant to G.S. § 163-27.1, by way of this resolution, the staff of the State Board is authorized to process voter registration applications for the counties identified above. This includes data entry and sending voter registration verification mailings, as needed. Similarly, a board of elections for the same counties identified above may authorize elections staff from another county or the State Board to carry out voter registration or any other administrative functions of the office.
8. **Coordination with State Division of Emergency Management.** By way of this resolution, the State Board acknowledges the need for continued coordination with the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) to provide aid to the local jurisdictions in support of elections. The task force between the State Board and NCEM is actively coordinating the resources and support needed by the affected counties to conduct elections in each county. The State Board's Executive Director shall designate a liaison to each of the affected county boards of elections to coordinate needed resources, which may include but are not limited to temporary facilities, generators, temporary restrooms, and other needs, utilizing such means as are necessary through the State Emergency Operations Center and assisted by such other personnel as necessary.

Adopted this the 7th day of October, 2024.



Alan Hirsch, Chair
State Board of Elections

Chair LEE. I now recognize Secretary Byrd for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. CORD BYRD

Mr. BYRD. Thank you, Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Members Sewell and Morelle and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak before this Committee about elections administration during natural disasters.

June 1st marked the beginning of the Atlantic hurricane season, which in Florida means that election season coincides with hurricane season. As such, it is imperative that we maintain robust election emergency plans. Florida does not delay or cancel elections, and voters must have the opportunity to vote in fair weather or foul.

Let me begin by providing a brief background of our elections in Florida.

Florida elections are overseen by the Secretary of State Division of Elections and are administered by the 67 county supervisors of elections.

By law, the Secretary of State also serves as Florida's chief elections officer. In this role, I work closely with the county supervisors to ensure their duties can be carried out in accordance with the Florida Constitution and election laws.

Elections administration is challenging enough when the sun is shining. Darkening skies compound these challenges, which makes emergency planning and preparation vital to our success.

During the last two election cycles, in 2022 and 2024, five severe hurricanes hit different parts of the State. Storms, fires, floods, and power outages can all happen during a major weather event, so we must be prepared for everything. This includes excess humidity, which can impact ballot paper thickness, which, in turn, can affect ballot processing.

In 2022, two major hurricanes hit Florida during the election cycle—one 30 days before the election during the early voting period and one during the election certification period.

Once we ensured that people were safe, I visited the affected counties to survey the damage. I saw firsthand the destruction and worked with supervisors of elections in impacted counties to determine their specific needs based on the obstacles voters faced in that county.

Governor DeSantis then issued executive orders addressing the needs identified by the supervisors. These orders established additional early voting sites, amended and extended reporting requirements, and extended deadlines for eligibility verification for voters.

As a result of these executive actions, the 2022 election voter turnout in the most severely impacted counties either closely matched or exceeded statewide voter turnout for that election year.

2024 was another active hurricane season, with three hurricanes hitting during the 60-day election cycle. As always, we adjusted to ensure voters had every opportunity to cast a ballot.

The first hurricane hit just weeks before the primary election. The second storm struck a month later, within a week of the supervisors canvassing the first votes for the general election. Weeks

after the second storm, a third major hurricane came ashore less than a month before the general election.

Again, I worked with the supervisors to determine their specific needs, and Governor DeSantis acted by signing executive orders tailored to meet those needs.

The executive orders created a streamlined process for displaced voters to have their vote-by-mail ballots sent to where they were living after the storms. It also gave supervisors the ability to relocate or consolidate polling sites or early voting sites.

We worked to ensure that first responders and linemen, working long hours and away from home, had the opportunity to cast their ballots. This is an important point. While displaced voters must be afforded the opportunity to cast a ballot, so too must the people who are responsible for the maintenance of order and the restoration of power.

While these storms disrupted the daily lives of voters, we ensured that it would not take away their ability to vote, and in 2024 Florida saw its highest voter turnout in 30 years. For example, Taylor County in Florida's panhandle received direct hits from two of the aforementioned hurricanes, yet it saw a 90.9-percent voter turnout.

Citizens want to vote. It was truly inspiring to see people perform their civic duty despite being displaced by these devastating storms.

First, the natural disasters of 2022 and 2024 reinforced the importance of excellent coordination and planning.

Second, Florida has proven that elections can still proceed even when emergencies are looming or when a community is recovering from disaster.

Third, Governor DeSantis has shown that executive orders are the key to election continuity.

Importantly, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each emergency is different. At the State level, our role is to assess the county's particular needs and find solutions.

Governor DeSantis and I used our executive powers to permit flexibility when warranted while also maintaining the high standard of election integrity established in Florida law.

Once executive action is carried out, it is important to inform the public. During elections, my staff provides information to supervisors and the public by issuing press releases, pushing messages on our official social media channels, updating our website, and answering calls to the voter hotline.

Emergency planning begins with coordination between State and county emergency responders and election administration officials.

The Florida approach to elections is clear: We do not move or delay elections. Instead, we are committed to ensuring that voters affected by emergencies can still exercise their right to vote.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today about how Florida administers elections during emergencies. I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Byrd follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CORD BYRD

Written Testimony of
Florida Secretary of State Cord Byrd
Before the Subcommittee on Elections
“Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters.”

Thank you, Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Member Sewell, for the opportunity to speak before this committee about elections administration during natural disasters. June 1 marked the beginning of the Atlantic Hurricane season, which, in Florida, means that election season coincides with hurricane season. As such, it is imperative that we maintain robust election emergency plans. Florida does not delay or cancel elections; voters must have the opportunity to vote in fair weather or foul.

Let me begin by providing a brief background on elections in Florida.

Florida elections are overseen by the Secretary of State, Division of Elections, and are administered by the 67 county Supervisors of Elections.

By law, the Secretary of State also serves as Florida’s Chief Elections Officer. In this role, I work closely with the county Supervisors to ensure their duties can be carried out in accordance with the Florida Constitution and election laws.

Elections administration is challenging enough when the sun is shining. Darkening skies compound these challenges, which make emergency planning and preparation vital to our success.

During the last two election cycles in 2022 and 2024, five severe hurricanes hit different parts of the state. Storms, fires, floods, and power outages can all happen during a major weather event, so we must be prepared for everything. This includes excess humidity, which can impact ballot paper thickness which, in turn, can affect ballot processing.

In 2022, two major hurricanes hit Florida during the election cycle.

One 30 days before the election during the early voting period, and one during the election certification period.

Once we ensured that people were safe, I visited the affected counties to survey the damage. I saw first-hand the destruction and worked with the Supervisors of Elections in impacted counties to determine their specific needs based on the obstacles voters faced in their county.

Governor DeSantis then issued Executive Orders addressing the needs identified by the Supervisors. These orders established additional early voting sites, amended and extended reporting requirements for Supervisors, and extended deadlines for eligibility verification for voters.

As a result of these executive actions, the 2022 General Election voter turnout in the most severely impacted counties either closely matched or exceeded statewide voter turnout for that election year.

2024 was another active hurricane season with three hurricanes hitting during the 60-day election cycle. As always, we adjusted to ensure voters had every opportunity to cast a ballot.

The first hurricane hit just weeks before Florida's Primary Election. The second storm struck a month later, within a week of the Supervisors canvassing the first votes for the General Election. Weeks after the second storm, a third major hurricane came ashore less than a month before the General Election.

Again, I worked with the Supervisors to determine their specific needs, and Governor DeSantis acted by signing Executive Orders tailored to meet those needs. The EOs created a streamlined process for displaced voters to have their vote-by-mail ballots sent to where they were living after the storms. It also gave Supervisors of Elections the ability to relocate or consolidate polling sites or early voting sites.

We worked to make sure first responders and linemen, working long hours and away from home, had the opportunity to cast their ballots. This is an important point. While displaced voters must be afforded the opportunity to cast a ballot, so too must the people who are responsible for the maintenance of order and the restoration of power.

While these storms disrupted the daily lives of voters, we ensured it would not take away their ability to vote.

And in 2024, Florida saw its highest voter turnout in 30 years.

For example, Taylor County, in Florida's Panhandle, received direct hits from two of the aforementioned hurricanes, yet it saw a 90.9% voter turnout.

Citizens want to vote. It was truly inspiring to see people perform their civic duty despite being displaced by these devastating storms.

First, the natural disasters of 2022 and 2024 reinforced the importance of excellent coordination and planning.

Second, Florida has proven that elections can still proceed, even when emergencies are looming or when a community is recovering from disaster.

Third, Governor DeSantis has shown that Executive Orders are the key to election continuity.

Importantly, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each emergency is different and at the state level, our role is to assess the counties' particular needs and find solutions.

Governor DeSantis and I used our executive powers to permit flexibility when warranted, while also maintaining the high standard of election integrity established in Florida law.

Once executive action is carried out, it's important to inform the public. During elections, my staff provides information to Supervisors and the public by issuing press releases, pushing messages on our official social media channels, updating our website, and answering calls to the voter hotline.

Emergency planning begins with coordination between state and county emergency responders and election administration officials.

Credit is also due to the voters themselves. We've learned that regardless of the circumstances, Floridians are determined to vote.

The Florida approach to elections is clear: we do not move or delay elections. Instead, we are committed to ensuring that voters affected by emergencies can still exercise their right to vote.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today about how Florida administers elections during emergencies. I look forward to answering any questions you may have for me.

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Chair LEE. I now recognize Ms. Brinson Bell for the purpose of an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF KAREN BRINSON BELL

Ms. BRINSON BELL. Thanks, Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Member Sewell and Members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to share the extraordinary work of election professionals to ensure safe and secure voting following the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina in 2024.

My name is Karen Brinson Bell, and I served as North Carolina's chief election official and executive director of the State Board of Elections from June 2019 to May 2025. Overseeing elections for more than 7.5 million registered voters across 100 counties, my tenure included navigating hurricanes, a global pandemic, and historic turnout.

My elections career began nearly 20 years ago in the mountains of western North Carolina, so Helene's impact was very personal.

Helene and previous disasters show the critical need for strong communication—and early and often—with Federal, State, and local partners, as well as steady, reliable funding and advanced preparation.

Our voters must have confidence that they will be able to cast a ballot and have that ballot count through any emergency. We do that by talking early and often, planning carefully, and ensuring all election offices have the resources they need well in advance.

Disaster response begins long before an event. Careful planning allowed us to act quickly when Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina on September 27th, 2024, dropping 30 inches of rain in Yancey County in 3 days and pushing water down the French Broad River at more than 240,000 gallons per second.

Preparedness meant adopting an all-hazards approach. We trained for the unexpected and embraced the philosophy, "We do not stop an election; we figure out how to proceed." Having managed elections during past hurricanes and the pandemic, we knew disruptions were inevitable. The challenge was how we respond.

When Helene struck, absentee by-mail voting had begun and ballots were in the mail stream. On Monday, September 30th, 14 county offices could not open. We had limited ability to communicate with local election officials and their staff. In some cases that week, we did not know if the election staff were OK or not.

Cell phone towers were down. There was no power and no internet. Since analog phone lines are mostly obsolete and email requires working computers or smartphones, communication from county to county or across the State was difficult and even non-existent in some circumstances.

State emergency management immediately prioritized elections with other critical infrastructure. Resources were provided through emergency management, FEMA, and State emergency funds, covering needs our regular budget could not. These funds covered portable toilets, tents, ATVs, satellite devices, generators, and more, much of which were delivered within days.

We requested \$2.5 million in legislative relief but only needed \$500,000, as most needs were met by State and Federal emergency management.

Legislative funds arrived after October 10th, just a week before early voting. Without North Carolina emergency management and FEMA's swift action, critical needs would have gone unmet.

In 1 week, all county offices reopened—no equipment damage, no ballots lost, and, most importantly, no election workers' lives lost. By October 17th, 76 of 80 planned early voting sites in the 25-county disaster region opened on schedule, with power. By Election Day, the vast majority of sites were open, with little consolidation and no isolated communities unserved. Only seven tent sites were needed.

Remarkably, western North Carolina surpassed the statewide turnout by 2 percentage points.

Emergency authority allowed the State board to act quickly, granting counties flexibility to adjust voting locations, appoint voting site officials from outside the precinct as needed, and allow absentee voters to return ballots to any county. By State law, affected voters could indicate "natural disaster" as an exception for showing voter ID.

September is National Preparedness Month. We are also approaching the 1-year anniversary of Hurricane Helene. We delivered voting in North Carolina because of advance preparation, strong communication, and intentional partnership with Federal, State, and local emergency management and other support structures who provided funding and resources in an emergency.

However, we cannot let our guard down or become complacent, as natural disasters will continue to occur and likely at the time of elections, given our Nation's election schedule. We cannot retract resources or funding. Rather, more needs to be dedicated to the effort to ensure voting continues and ballots are counted no matter the circumstances.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Brinson Bell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KAREN BRINSON BELL**Testimony of Karen Brinson Bell**

**U.S. House Subcommittee on Elections Hearing
“Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters”
September 16, 2025**

Thank you, Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Sewell, and Members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to share the extraordinary work of election professionals and our partners to ensure that safe and secure voting continued in western North Carolina following the devastation of Hurricane Helene in the fall of 2024.

My name is Karen Brinson Bell, and from June 1, 2019 until May 14, 2025, I had the honor of serving as North Carolina’s chief election official and the executive director of the State Board of Elections, overseeing the voting process for more than 7.5 million registered voters and leading the 100 county boards of elections through hurricanes, a global pandemic, and record-setting turnout. Since 2006, I have served in various roles at the county, state, and national levels within the elections profession. Most of my elections career has been in the mountains of western North Carolina, first as field support for the 12 western-most counties and next as Transylvania County’s director. While born and raised in eastern North Carolina, more of my life has been in western North Carolina than anywhere else. When Helene struck, it was personal because I know those affected, I know the rivers and ridgelines. And I also know firsthand the tenacity, resiliency, and absolute grit of the people.

Helene and previous disasters show the critical need for strong communication early and often among federal, state, and local partners, as well as steady, reliable funding and advance preparation. Our voters must have confidence that they will be able to cast a ballot and have that ballot count through any emergency situation. We do that by talking early and often, planning carefully, and ensuring all election offices have the resources they need well in advance.

Ahead of the 2024 election, North Carolina was identified as a swing state. As such, we knew the spotlight would be on us and that we could not start planning early enough. There’s a buildout that begins years in advance to prepare for any situation. From tabletop exercises at the state and local level with emergency

management and other partners to continuing our twice per month Huddles (statewide virtual trainings with the counties), our state conferences, our HUBS collaborative approach to work, and our Monday Morning Kickoffs (standups five weeks before a large election), we trained for the moment, we exercised for the moment, and we planned for the moment throughout my six-year tenure as state director.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Responding to a disaster or emergency does not simply happen in the moment. Dotting the Is and crossing the Ts in advance ensured that we were well positioned when Helene moved into western North Carolina on Thursday, September 26, 2024, and unleashed her devastation on Friday, September 27, 2024, dumping 30 inches of rain in Yancey County in just three days and pushing water down the French Board River at more than 240,000 gallons per second.

In a year when we thought our biggest challenge might be AI, having an “all hazards” approach meant we prepared for the unknown and pivoted when disaster struck. With this planning and preparation in place, I was able to consistently reiterate, “We don’t stop an election; we figure out how to proceed.” Having guided the state through elections during Hurricane Dorian and the global pandemic, we already knew that it’s not a matter of if there will be a disruption of an election, it’s a matter of when it will occur, how it will occur, and how we respond.

HURRICANE HELENE

The week that Helene struck, we had just started sending out absentee-by-mail ballots, which had been delayed because of a candidate withdrawal dispute. On Monday, September 30th, 14 county election offices were unable to open as scheduled, and we had limited ability to communicate with local election officials and their staff. In some cases that week, we did not know if the elections staff were okay or not. Cell phone towers were down. There was no power and no internet. Since analog phone lines are mostly obsolete and email requires working computers or smart phones, communication from county to county or across the state was difficult and even non-existent in some circumstances.

In the first 24 hours, the State Emergency Management Director and I were on the phone. He made it clear that State Emergency Management (NCEM), in the midst of their rescue efforts and standing up essential services, understood that elections were underway and would be supported just like other critical infrastructure. He had already taken steps to designate elections as a priority because of the proximity of in-person early voting starting in less than 20 days, their understanding that absentee ballots still had to go out and be received, and that voter registration was at its peak. Over the first few days, NCEM provided resources to ensure voting could continue, and we conveyed this to North Carolinians as early as the second business day after the storm passed – the election would happen and voters would be able to vote. Through NCEM, FEMA, and the state’s emergency fund, we were immediately provided with the financial, personnel, and logistical resources that we did not have in our operating budget. This fulfillment was so seamless, I even conveyed this to the legislative staff when asked in the first few days what resources were needed. As a relief package was put together in October, we requested approximately \$2.5 million, and the legislature authorized \$5 million. Because so much was supported through NCEM and FEMA, we only needed approximately \$500,000 of the legislative funding to ensure those impacted by the hurricane could vote safely and securely.

Emergency funding and resources are critical in these times of crisis. The day-to-day operating budget of the State Board of Elections could not absorb the costs of responding to Helene. NCEM and FEMA did that – delivering portable toilets, blank-slate tents, ATVs and personnel to cross rivers, satellite communication devices, gas, generators, battery backups, and more – with the only instruction being keep the receipts and setting a deadline for requests. Some of these services were delivered within the first few days. While our legislature worked as expeditiously as a governing body could, those relief funds were not in place until after the bill was enacted on October 10, 2024, just seven days before the start of early voting, which is the most used voting method by North Carolinians. NCEM and FEMA were able to immediately meet critical needs and fill the urgent resource gaps.

RESULT OF PROPER PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Within one week of the wrath of Helene, all county offices were operational – no equipment damage, no ballots ruined, and most importantly no election worker lives lost. By the start of early voting on October 17th, 76 of the planned 80 voting sites in the 25-county disaster declared region opened with power and sufficient workers. These counties represent 1/4 of the counties in our state and approximately 1.3 million registered voters. The region includes one of the larger counties in our state and some of the smallest. They reflect economically thriving and struggling communities. And they are red, blue, purple, and every political ideology in between.

By Election Day, a temporary road or alternate route was in place to reach every isolated community. Very few polling places were consolidated – we took voting to the people. Only 7 tents were needed as replacement voting sites. We delivered options for voting, and the voters showed up. Western North Carolina outpaced the rest of the state by 2 percentage points in turnout.

This herculean effort would not have been possible without our partners and advanced planning. The State Board also had emergency authority, which they exercised, and later these provisions became part of the legislature's relief act. These measures, which we developed in consultation with the affected counties, included:

- Authorization for county boards of elections by bipartisan majority vote to modify their early voting plans and Election Day precinct voting sites.
- Ability for the county boards of elections by bipartisan majority vote to appoint election officials for early voting and Election Day sites registered outside of the precinct, from other counties, and change assignments from previous designations.
- Allowing absentee-by-mail voters or their near relatives to deliver the completed ballot to any county in the state or to the State Board of Elections, and other provisions giving flexibility for voting absentee at the county office and returning ballots to Election Day voting sites.
- Assistance by multi-partisan assistance teams at disaster shelters and relief facilities.

Because the State Board of Elections had emergency authorization, we were able to take immediate action and give the counties the leeway to get the job done and the voters the flexibility needed to exercise their right to vote. This is a key takeaway that other states should consider as they navigate how to respond to disruptions to elections. Also of note, the 2024 General Election was the largest election with Voter ID in use in our state. No action was needed on this matter, as state law allows an exception form in lieu of an acceptable form of ID. Natural disaster is an acceptable exception. If other states with Voter ID do not have such a provision in law, then an amendment to the law or emergency authority are recommended.

Other lessons learned from this experience include:

- **Build, exercise, and maintain working relationships:** Relationships with emergency management and other partners like IT services, National Guard, and federal partners like CISA, EAC, USPS, and FBI were critical to stand up our election operations in an emergency.
- **Integrate with these partners:** With each election, large or small, the State Board staff and two members of the State Board were activated on Election Day with these partners at the North Carolina Emergency Operations Center. Many counties have adopted a similar practice either on-site or through a Web-EOC. We also met monthly and had dedicated working groups as needed. They learned our language, and we learned theirs.
- **Have continuous engagement with vendors:** Had there been damage to equipment or ballots, established communication would have been critical to prepare new equipment or prepare new ballots in time. Fortunately, we did not face this, but our working relationship with our vendors meant one even provided more than 1,800 meals on Election Day to workers in the affected counties recognizing that power and usable water were still issues in many areas.
- **Know old school, manual methods and how to shift to them:** Election officials must anticipate worst case scenarios like loss of power, cell service, and internet. Backup processes like printed rosters with contact information for poll workers and hand-held radios can be quick solutions to continue normal operations.

- **Communication is key – internally and externally:** Keep staff, Board members, other counties, and engaged partners informed through stand-up meetings and daily reports via email. Routine updates also reduced meetings allowing those in direct response to do the work that needed to be done, while those on standby were kept apprised. Also, communicate with the public through press releases and press availability. With limited power and internet access early on, local radio and information posted at disaster relief centers, though rather rudimentary, became crucial to let people know that voting would take place.
- **Prepare in advance for all hazards:** In today's environment, it's not a matter of if there will be a disruption in voting, rather when and how. Our response to Helene was years in the making and built on lessons learned by delivering voting during the pandemic. Develop continuity of operation and crisis communication plans and put them into action not just on a shelf or computer file. We also deployed our Attack Response Kits (ARKs), which were originally assembled to set up a temporary elections office because of a cybersecurity attack, but these kits provided replacements or additional laptops and secure connectivity before service was restored in several of our counties. An all-hazards approach has long been used by emergency management and law enforcement. Adoption of this strategy has furthered our partnerships and improved our election readiness.
- **Funding needs to be appropriated for emergency communication:** Our legislature was able to act quickly, but we also benefited from a Voter ID education campaign that was already underway and were able to expand the contract with the advertising firm rather than having to go out to bid. Paid communication was needed in the affected region and across the state including print, radio, flyers, mobile billboards, and social media to inform voters, and their friends and family, with the simple message, "You can still vote" with a QR code and website directing them to the details of the provisions put in place to ensure they could vote and that their vote would count.
- **Finally, be human:** Much like the instruction on an airplane to place your oxygen mask on first before helping others, we had to remember that county staff lost their homes and belongings, poll workers were displaced, and more than 100 lives were lost and hundreds of others needed rescue.

To stand up the election meant we first had to stand up personal situations in many incidents. We also had to consider how best to reach people and make things as simple as possible at a difficult time, like collocating voting sites with disaster relief centers. We found that ensuring the voters could cast their ballot gave them a voice when many thought they were not being heard and often they said voting “restored a sense of normalcy” otherwise lost in all the devastation.

September is National Preparedness Month. We are also approaching the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Helene. We delivered voting in North Carolina because of advanced preparation, strong communication, and intentional partnership with federal, state, and local emergency management and other support structures, who provided funding and resources in an emergency. However, we cannot let our guard down or become complacent, as natural disasters will continue to occur and likely at the time of elections given our nation’s election schedule. We cannot retract resources or funding, rather more needs to be dedicated to the effort to ensure voting continues and ballots are counted no matter the circumstance.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Chair LEE. Thank you.

I will begin our questions today, followed by the Ranking Member. I now recognize myself for the purpose of questioning our witnesses.

Secretary Byrd, I would like to begin with you and discuss the coordination between the Florida Department of State and State and local emergency management officials.

Would you share with us a bit about that coordination and how coordinating with local emergency management prepares election administrators across the State for incidents of severe weather.

Mr. BYRD. Thank you, Chairwoman Lee, for the question. Certainly, as my predecessor in Florida, you are no stranger to the issues of hurricanes in Florida.

At the county level—because that is where the elections are administered—we encourage the supervisor of elections to coordinate with their local county emergency management.

Then, of course, we have emergency management at the State level. As a storm approaches and once we have ensured that all lives are safe and secure, then we can strain (ph) resources from the State level. We have resources prepositioned throughout the State. We have individuals who are prepositioned from our office in the places—or around the State and then certainly in the areas where there is going to be a hurricane.

With elections being critical infrastructure, we can surge resources to them. If I am in communication with the supervisor and—whatever they need, from clearing a road to getting power back up and running, to internet connection and service, whatever those needs are, because they are critical infrastructure, we can

then work with State emergency management to work with local emergency management to get the resources up and running.

Chair LEE. In particular—those are some great examples—how does your office ensure effective communication? Because one of the things that typically happens in these kinds of storms is a loss of, potentially, cell signal or loss of power. What can you all do to help ensure communication from State to local election officials, especially if those regular lines of communication are unavailable after a storm?

Mr. BYRD. Certainly we have satellite phones that are available to us in case communications go down.

Fortunately, in Florida, because of our long history with hurricanes, much of the infrastructure is now being—is placed underground, which limits some of the ability for those types of communications to be knocked out.

We are utilizing services like Starlink to be able to get resources to a supervisor's office.

Those are some of the examples of how we maintain communication.

As I said in the answer to my—or my previous answer, we have individuals that are prepositioned around the State from our office to be directly communicating, to be boots on the ground, in the affected areas.

Chair LEE. What other key lessons can other States learn from Florida, where election season so routinely coincides with hurricanes?

Mr. BYRD. Once again, prepositioning resources; tabletopping or game-planning the scenarios, what is going on happen.

Then really, you know, having that communication with the individual supervisors so that—we want to use a scalpel to pinpoint exactly what resources they need and provide—we want to make as few changes to our election system as possible, so we really want to take a targeted approach and meet the needs of that individual county. In one storm, we may have a flooding event in one county but it could be power outages in another county. There are going to be different needs, so it is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Chair LEE. Mr. Eggers, what Secretary Byrd just said reminds me of one of your comments in your opening statement about finding the right remedies and targeting those remedies to fit the needs that develop in a situation.

Would you describe for us, please, the type of logistical problems that Hurricane Helene caused for your election procedures, particularly in western North Carolina, and how you all adapted to meet those challenges?

Mr. EGGERS. Thank you, Chair Lee.

The logistics were, first and foremost, communication, because we had no communication between the various counties and the State to address those items. That was handled in a number of different ways, between the Starlinks being delivered, but also just by word of mouth, by folks going from one county to another.

Our first emergency resolution, I had to inform a county board of elections that we had canceled several of their meetings on their behalf, and they said, “Good. We could not get anyone here to do that.”

It is a process of building communication first and then building the infrastructure back so that you can get what is needed both through local emergency management, through State emergency management, and on up the chain. Logistics are the key for building back those precincts in those locations that are critical to our access.

Chair LEE. Thank you, Secretary Eggers.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. MORELLE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Brinson Bell, the administration has, as I mentioned in my opening comments—they are cutting Federal Government staff, resources that focus on elections as well as critical disaster preparedness programs.

In your written testimony, you mentioned critical partnerships and resources, agencies like CISA, EAC, emergency management, and other Federal partners.

As election officials assess and plan for the next election, how will the loss of these partnerships and resources impact contingency planning and training? How will election officials utilize the resources they have to fill these gaps? Frankly, is there enough—do they have enough resources to fill some of these gaps?

Ms. BRINSON BELL. Thank you for that question.

Election administrators across the country are certainly concerned about the reduced support that we are receiving from the Federal agencies, particularly CISA. That was a critical partnership in helping us to build out what was really a 6-year plan in how we were ready for Helene.

In North Carolina, we met monthly with our State, Federal, and local partners in preparation for any hazard that might be necessary to conduct an election through. We had them onsite with us during elections, as we positioned ourselves at the emergency operations center.

We very much utilized the Tabletop the Vote exercise, which I am not sure will continue with the reduced support. That actually had us well-prepared, because we took Tabletop the Vote to a statewide exercise that we then delivered to local—the 100 counties, for them to exercise with their local emergency management, State IT and county IT, you know, various partners, law enforcement and so forth, to ensure that, no matter the hazard, that we were prepared. I think that is why we were able to pivot so quickly.

I also mentioned that the Federal funding was critical in those first few days. It was not a matter of how much we had; it was a matter of—the questions to us were, what do you need, and those things were delivered. You know, for example, a portable toilet was not available in Yancey County to the elections office. They did not have those resources. Emergency management and FEMA got those in place.

The same with the seven tent sites that we used. FEMA delivered those tents; FEMA provided the security for that. I am not sure, given some of the cuts, if we are really in a position to ensure that that takes place.

The legislature certainly provided funding, but it took until October 10th for that to come through. The Federal Government and

the State emergency fund, in particular, were the ones who met the need immediately.

Mr. MORELLE. I am curious—in Fiscal Year 2023, the appropriation for election assistance from the Federal Government was \$75 million. We passed out of the Appropriations Committee an amount of \$15 million, so a cut of 80 percent from 2023.

I am just curious. In North Carolina, what does it cost to run a statewide Presidential general election?

Ms. BRINSON BELL. The survey in 2016, post-Presidential election, was that the cost was \$17 million. We know this because North Carolina is the only State that requires the voting equipment vendors to post a bond to be certified as a voting equipment supplier in North Carolina.

We just completed that survey, and the board just adopted the new bond amount, which is over \$35 million to conduct a new election in the State of North Carolina.

At \$75 million, you know, all of that is halfway spent in North Carolina alone. Fifteen million does not even get it done. You know, it is costly to conduct a new election.

Mr. MORELLE. Yes.

You may have said this, and I may have missed it. What was the additional cost in 2024 as a result of the natural disaster? If you have a baseline amount—you said \$75 million, roughly. What was the additional cost of the hurricane?

Ms. BRINSON BELL. You know, the additional costs were really not something that we had to bring out of our budget. There was \$2.5 million allotted by the legislature. We spent about \$500,000, a lot of that on efforts to communicate to the voters through a media campaign and so forth.

The actual other expenditures were absorbed through State and Federal funding, through FEMA and the State emergency fund.

Mr. MORELLE. Yes. OK. I do appreciate that.

Rather than going over, because I am sure my next question would elicit a longer answer, I am going to yield back again.

Thank you to everybody for being here.

Madam Chair.

Chair LEE. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from North Carolina, Dr. Murphy, for 5 minutes.

Dr. MURPHY. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thank you guys for coming today.

I live over in the east, and we have those little whirly storms a little bit more over in our neck of the woods than they do in the west. Actually, I went in a helicopter and surveyed the damage with Senators Tillis and Budd just 3 days afterwards, and it was cataclysmic. How you guys got anything done is a testament to hard work.

You know, I hear constantly now, it is the cry of, “The Federal Government is not paying enough.” We are hurdling toward a financial sovereign debt crisis, and it is time, actually, for States to stop screaming for the Federal Government to pay and now States take a little bit more burden.

It is great that in North Carolina people had the foresight, through the General Assembly, to establish a rainy day fund. Hell,

that is what it is there for, when it is a rainy day or one of those things. It is glad that they had the speed with which to work and to be able to fund you in ways that we have.

If there are discrepancies as we move forward, it is time for the State to step up. We cannot default the—we cannot bankrupt the country, because we have things that need to be funded, when States can do these also.

Just to kind of follow-up with this, with what you guys are going through, I believe you really did a very Herculean job in pulling this off. Whether it changed elections, I do not know, but I still think the fact that we were able to get people to vote when literally so many roads were washed out is a miracle.

Mr. Eggert, let me just ask a couple questions of you.

How did the State's board, which is a bipartisan board, how did that come into play to try actually effectuating availability of voting sites and how things get done, and hopefully did politics play a role?

Mr. EGGERS. Yes, sir, I am very proud of the work my colleagues and I were able to do related to tailoring what was needed for emergency relief to a bipartisan nature so that we could target those items that could address necessary changes, such as relocating polling places if the site or building had been destroyed or washed away, while not taking steps that would try and give partisan advantage to either side.

It was a good show of the American spirit of coming together in the wake of a disaster, not in the name of politics but in the name of, how can we restore consistency to the process? Because consistency in elections builds confidence in elections. That is what the voters are looking for.

Dr. MURPHY. That is very heartening to hear. In these days of horrible partisanship and violence, it is a good testament for North Carolina to be able to do that.

If you had to give a percentage of people that you did not feel had access to be able to vote merely because of the storm, could you postulate on what that might be?

Mr. EGGERS. That would be difficult to come up with an answer, to come up with that solution.

I would say that, based upon the changes and the work that were done and also the records and the procedures taken by both the county boards and by their staff, we were able to open all but almost seven precincts—in, say, Buncombe County, which has 200,000 voters—and get voters information to where they could still get to a voting site.

I would like to think we were able to mitigate the impact of the storm as far as the accessibility and availability of voting to voters, and I am not aware of any voters who stated that they were unable to vote in the most recent Presidential election.

Dr. MURPHY. Great. Again, testament to a good bipartisan nature in North Carolina. Hats off to you guys.

Just one other question, and then I will shut up. The State board allows the local boards to have some flexibility in what they do. Was that good? Bad? Indifferent? How well did that play into the situation?

Mr. EGGERS. It worked well in all but one county. In one county, I believe there was a little bit of gamesmanship that was attempted. Ultimately, the legislature stepped in on a bipartisan basis and was able to restore a number of sites that had been cut—

Dr. MURPHY. Can you expound upon that?

Mr. EGGERS. Yes, sir. In Henderson County, they consolidated all of their sites to one central site. It resulted in long lines and crowded parking lots. The legislature adjusted their plan, on a bipartisan basis, such that there was more accessibility to the rural areas of the county and the harder-to-reach areas of the county.

Otherwise, I think all the decisions were, of course, bipartisan and were a great success.

Dr. MURPHY. Great. I mean, that is a testament. Because, you know, given the hostile nature of what politics is these days, I think it is a good lesson for everybody to have examples that people can actually work together, let them vote, let the voters decide, and be as it is.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. I will yield back.

Chair LEE. Great.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Illinois, Mrs. Miller, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Thank you to our witnesses today.

Secretary Byrd, thank you for your testimony and for offering your perspective as the chief election officer for a State that has long faced natural disasters during the fall election season.

It definitely is a credit to the work of Florida's election officials that, despite facing three hurricanes during the 2024 election, Florida saw the highest voter turnout in 30 years.

My question is, how does your office guarantee the integrity of a displaced voter's ballot?

Mr. BYRD. This goes once again to being in communication with the elected supervisor of elections in that county and asking what their specific needs are.

For example, if there are a high number of displaced voters, we change some of the rules to allow a vote-by-mail ballot to be sent to the location where they were displaced. Where typically that request has to be in writing, we allowed them to call in and make that request of the supervisor. That is one example.

Once again, not just the people that are affected but the people who—the emergency responders, our first responders, our linemen, the people who are making sure the power and safety—the power comes back on and the safety—making sure that they are able to vote, because many of them come from counties where they could be able to vote but now they are in the county that has been impacted.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you.

When entire counties or localities must be evacuated, how do local election supervisors safeguard election infrastructure and supplies that are necessary to run polling locations?

Mr. BYRD. Well, they are the real heroes. I mean, they are the ones who—they stay in their counties. I mean, I was on the phone

with a supervisor of elections who had 3 feet of water in her home. She was still doing her job. She was on the phone with us.

Once she made sure that all of her people were safe—I mean, her mission, she was elected to do that job. They are staying; they are not evacuating. They are staying in their county. They are going out as soon as it is safe to go to the polling sites to see which are still operable, which are down, and what we need to do to then get resources to get those sites back up and running.

Mrs. MILLER. Mr. Eggers, in your written testimony, you rightly point out that delaying or suspending elections should never be an option.

As your office managed the aftermath of the storm that hit North Carolina, how did provisional ballots come into play during the 2024 general election when the western part of the State was heavily hit?

Mr. EGGERS. Part of the changes that we made related to the processing of ballots was to allow absentee ballots to be turned in in other localities and locations.

We were fortunately able to restore connectivity to the State, so that allowed counties to have their voter rolls accessible to them, so that minimized the need for provisional ballots in the various counties.

I have noted in my statement that, even if we lost all communications and a county needed to run an election or a precinct needed to run an election with no communication, with no computers, with no documentation, that they could do so with pens, paper, and a place to store them, and, ideally, envelopes for provisional ballots. Really, just pen and paper and a waterproof container can run an election in America.

Mrs. MILLER. Are there lessons learned from Hurricane Helene that you think will change the way certain practices will be implemented either before or after a natural disaster strikes?

Mr. EGGERS. Yes. In western North Carolina, we are not used to hurricanes. We can handle a snowstorm; we are used to that. When it came to a storm that destroyed all of our infrastructure, it really highlighted the fact that all of our communications are fiber-optic and they are all land-based and that we needed a backup system. That is something that each of the counties simply did not have, to have a satellite phone, such as Secretary Byrd has mentioned, and some of those practices.

I know we are looking at some of the things that Florida does as best practices so that we can implement those in North Carolina and prepare for natural disasters that we think would not affect us.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you for your testimony.

I yield back.

Chair LEE. Without objection, and at the request of Representative Bice from Oklahoma, I would like to insert an article into the record. The Fox News article is entitled, "Oklahoma power outages linger after ice storm, here is why Election Day will not be impacted."

[The article referred to follows:]

9/16/25, 4:55 PM

Oklahoma power outages linger after ice storm, here's why Election Day won't be impacted


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Oklahoma power outages linger after ice storm, here's why Election Day won't be impacted

By Travis Fedschun

Published November 02, 2020

Fox News

Tens of thousands of residents across Oklahoma remain without power Monday after a devastating ice storm last week, but officials stress it won't impact Election Day.

Oklahoma Gas & Electric said the storm that brought down trees and power lines across the region caused the largest outage in company history, impacting more than 400,000 customers.

In the days since, OG&E said it's restored power to nearly 290,000 customers as of Sunday night, but some may need to wait until Friday to get their power back.

THE LATEST FOX NEWS 2020 BATTLEGROUND POWER RANKINGS

According to OG&E, 96% of 800 polling locations in the company's service area have power. The remaining locations still in the dark are expected to have their power restored by Tuesday.

"We continue to coordinate with the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management to make sure polling stations have power for Tuesday's election," OG&E director of corporate affairs Brian Alford said in a statement to FOX25.

WEATHER-RELATED POWER OUTAGES FROM ZETA, ICE STORM COMPLICATE VOTING BEFORE ELECTION DAY

The utility is working with Oklahoma Emergency Management to secure generators as a contingency.

Statewide there are still over 140,000 customers without power as of Monday morning, according to the tracking website poweroutage.us.

ICE STORM DAMAGES SURVIVOR TREE AT OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL, OVER 300K WITHOUT POWER

Even if polling locations still don't have power, State Election Board officials have said voting can continue because Oklahoma uses paper ballots.



Voters fill out their ballots once inside the polling place at the Oklahoma County Election Board, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020, in Oklahoma City. (AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki)

"All of the voting machines have 'emergency bins' where ballots can be deposited in the event of a power outage or technical issue," State Board of Elections spokeswoman Misha Mohr told The Oklahoman. "Ballots can then be counted by the voting machine once the power is back on or they can be counted at the county election board."

CLICK HERE FOR MORE WEATHER COVERAGE FROM FOX NEWS

The storm last week did not appear to deter early voting. Photos from Friday and Saturday showed long lines as people waited to

<https://www.foxnews.com/us/oklahoma-power-outages-ice-storm-election-day-voting-polling-stations-restoration.print>

1/2

9/16/25, 4:55 PM

Oklahoma power outages linger after ice storm, here's why Election Day won't be impacted vote.

Voters at the front of a line in Edmond were reporting five-hour waits to vote.



In this Friday, Oct. 30, 2020 file photo, the line for early voting at a polling place in Oklahoma County wraps around Edmond Church of Christ in Edmond, Okla. (AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki)

According to the State Election Board, Oklahoma's voter registrations surged ahead of Election Day, with a net increase of more than 169,000 registered voters since Jan. 15 and a net increase of nearly 53,000 since Sept. 30.



The line for early voting at a polling place in Oklahoma County wraps around the Edmond Church of Christ and more, Friday, Oct. 30, 2020, in Edmond, Okla. (AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki)

Oklahoma's voter registration statistics released on Sunday show that registered Republicans now make up more than 50% of Oklahoma's registered voters for the first time.

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"The surge in voter registrations is a clear indication that Oklahomans are highly interested in the 2020 general election. It is a positive sign for higher voter participation this year," Paul Zirix, secretary of the State Election Board, said in a statement. "The new statistics also continue the decades-long growth trend for Republicans and independents as a percentage of Oklahoma's electorate."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Travis Fedtschun is a reporter for FoxNews.com. Follow him on Twitter @travfed

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Chair LEE. I would like to thank our witnesses for appearing before us today.

Members of the Committee may have some additional questions for you, and we ask that you please respond to those questions, if any, in writing.

Without objection, each Member will have 5 legislative days to insert additional material into the record or to revise and extend their remarks.

[The written testimony of the Southern Poverty Law Center follows:]



Written Testimony of the Southern Poverty Law Center

Submitted to the U.S. Committee on House Administration
Subcommittee on Elections

In connection with its September 16, 2025 hearing entitled
“Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters”

Hearing September 16, 2025
Organizational Testimony Submitted September 23, 2025



**Keeping the Power On:
The Case for Voter Resilience in the Face of Disaster**

Note this content originally appeared as an essay on the Southern Poverty Law Center's website on September 2, 2025 and was authored by Zach Mahafza, Data and Research Analyst at the Southern Poverty Law Center. The original post may be found at:
<https://www.splcenter.org/resources/reports/hurricane-katrina-voting-impact/>

Hurricane Katrina brought devastation to the Gulf Coast, with an estimated 1,392 fatalities¹, 300,000 homes² destroyed, and over a million people displaced.³ The storm was responsible for over \$125 billion in damages⁴ and an estimated \$2.9 billion in lost wages due to destruction and displacement. After Katrina's destruction, Louisiana was challenged with how to recover, including how to maintain free and fair elections.

New Orleans municipal elections were initially scheduled for February 2006, just five months after Katrina made landfall. However, these elections would be plagued with problems resulting from the storm. Large swaths of the city had been destroyed and remained so by the time the elections were scheduled. Much of the election infrastructure had been destroyed as well, including polling sites and voting machines. Of New Orleans' 442 polling places, 295 were destroyed⁵ by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This destruction prompted a decision to delay the election until April 22 of that year.

Numerous methods of alternative voting were utilized, including voting by mail and early voting at locations across Louisiana to allow displaced people a means to cast a ballot. Some displaced

¹ *How many people died in Hurricane Katrina? Toll reduced 17 years later*, January 14, 2023, https://www.nola.com/news/hurricane/how-many-people-died-in-katrina-toll-reduced-17-years-on/article_e3009e46-91ed-11ed-8f2a-a7b11e1e8d34.html.

² *Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned—Chapter One: Katrina in Perspective*, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned/chapter1.html>.

³ *Facts for features: Katrina impact*. The Data Center. <https://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/katrina/facts-for-impact/>.

⁴ LSU Libraries. *Research Guides: Louisiana Hurricanes: Impact on Economy*, <https://guides.lib.lsu.edu/Hurricanes/KatrinaEconomy>.

⁵ Kevin J. Coleman & Eric a. Fischer, *Elections in States Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*, Congressional Research Service, October 17, 2006, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20061017_RS22436_01d86d7ee48093f2f20352e7b8d4987e6af7c688.pdf.



people were bused in from as far as Atlanta⁶ to vote for their next mayor. The storm's impact of displacing thousands of voters depressed voter turnout to 36%,⁷ down 10 points from 2002.

Due to the flood impacting predominantly Black areas of New Orleans and preexisting socioeconomic inequities, Black voters were less able to return⁸ to the city and directly participate in the election. This meant displaced populations were even more reliant upon alternative mechanisms to cast their ballots. Because these mechanisms were not sufficiently robust, there was a decrease in voter participation among minority communities. While early and absentee voting was offered, there was confusion over the rules⁹ for satellite voting places. This was further exacerbated by FEMA¹⁰ not sharing information with election officials that could have reduced the complications associated with voting by mail for displaced voters.

The consequences of these inadequate systems led to significant changes in the Louisiana electorate. The loss of so many Black residents from New Orleans and prioritizing the recovery of predominantly white parts of the city led to significant shifts in the balance of power¹¹ within the state. Overall, losing Black voting power undercut local political expression and impacted future redistricting, which already faced significant barriers from lingering white supremacist policies kept in check by the Voting Rights Act.¹²

While Katrina itself was notable for the grand scope of its impact, it was by no means the only natural disaster to have harmed the South, nor was it the first hurricane to complicate local elections. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy¹³ had a similar impact by flooding predominantly Black

⁶ Troeh, E, *City Elections Held in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, NPR, April 22, 2006,

<https://www.npr.org/2006/04/22/5357540/city-elections-held-in-post-katrina-new-orleans>.

⁷ Kevin J. Coleman & Eric a. Fischer, *Elections in States Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*, Congressional Research Service, October 17, 2006,

https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20061017_RS22436_01d86d7ee48093f2f20352e7b8d4987e6af7c688.pdf.

⁸ William P. Quigley, *Katrina Voting Wrongs: Aftermath of Hurricane and Weak Enforcement Dilute African American Voting Rights in New Orleans*, 2007, <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol14/iss1/5>

⁹ Kevin J. Coleman & Eric a. Fischer, *Elections in States Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*, Congressional Research Service, October 17, 2006,

https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20061017_RS22436_01d86d7ee48093f2f20352e7b8d4987e6af7c688.pdf.

¹⁰ *FairVote—Addressing Louisiana's Post-Katrina Electoral Problems*, <https://archive.fairvote.org/katrina/>

¹¹ William P. Quigley, *Katrina Voting Wrongs: Aftermath of Hurricane and Weak Enforcement Dilute African American Voting Rights in New Orleans*, 14 Wash. & Lee J. Civ. Rts. & Soc. Just. 49, 49 (2007), <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol14/iss1/5>.

¹² Debo P. Adegbile, *Voting Rights in Louisiana: 1982–2006*, 17 Rev. of L. & Soc. Just. 413, 413–473, https://gould.usc.edu/students/journals/rlsj/issues/assets/docs/issue_17/04_Louisiana_Macro.pdf.

¹³ Brian Brox, *Elections and Voting in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, 16 *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*, 2009, <https://www2.tulane.edu/~bbrox/BroxSoSt.pdf>.



neighborhoods, displacing people, and making it difficult to vote. According to the National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), the number of billion-dollar disasters has averaged 19 per year¹⁴ across the U.S. since 2015, with 27 such disasters happening in 2024. Table 1 shows the number of billion-dollar disasters for Deep South states since 1980, including several disasters that impacted multiple states at once.

Billion-Dollar Disasters Since 1980 in the Deep South

Table 1

	Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Louisiana	Mississippi
Drought	2	7	17	15	17
Flooding	1	4	4	10	5
Freeze	1	5	3	1	3
Tornadoes & Severe Storms	35	33	68	44	50
Hurricanes & Tropical Cyclones	11	36	27	27	22
Wildfires	1	4	3	0	1
Winter Storms	1	5	12	9	10
Total Number of Disasters	52	94	134	106	108

Source: NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI)

Climate change is increasingly impacting people's lives, and the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are increasing. Because of this, we are seeing new challenges across a variety of economic, social and political systems, including the potential effect on our electoral processes and systems.

¹⁴NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, *Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters* (2025), <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/summary-stats/US/2015-2024>.



The electoral system is woefully underfunded in a variety of areas, but the lack of climate resilience is one area where the underfunding will have significant community impacts should this issue remain unaddressed. As Table 2¹⁵ suggests, the displacement of over a million adults just in the last year could have an impact on electoral results across the Deep South.

Number of Adults Displaced in the Deep South Due to Natural Disasters (as of Sept. 2024)

Table 2

	Total Adult Population Displaced in the Last Year	Adult Population Displaced for 6 Months or Longer
Alabama	104,364	62,034
Florida	710,499	153,870
Georgia	138,474	88,597
Louisiana	136,458	10,423
Mississippi	20,410	1,457
Total	1,110,205	316,381

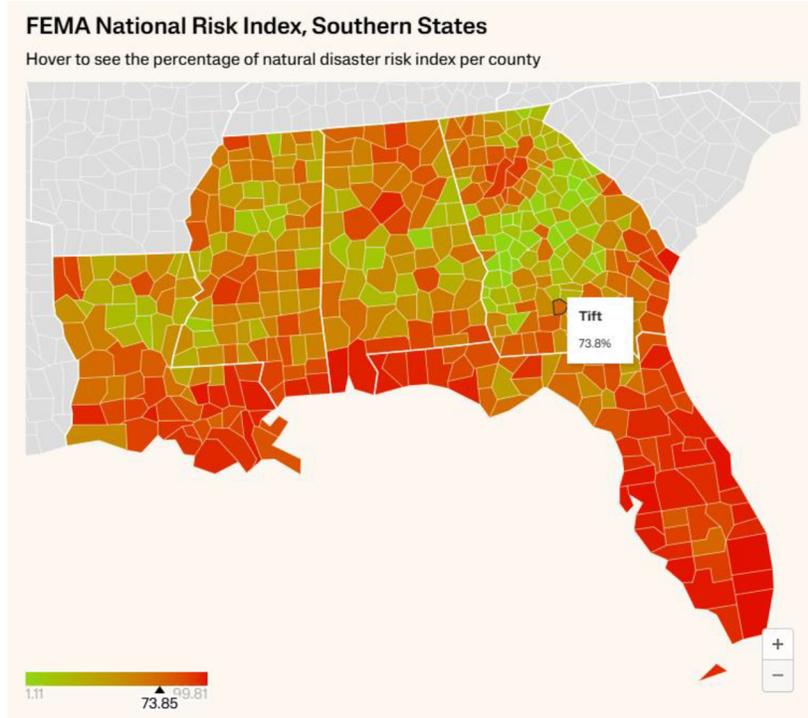
Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

It is also noteworthy that these displacements are across counties of different political leanings, implying that climate resiliency against natural disasters is essentially a nonpartisan issue. According to Rebuild by Design,¹⁶ 99.5% of congressional districts had “at least one federally declared disaster due to extreme weather” between 2011 and 2024, displacing millions of people. The map below¹⁷ of FEMA’s disaster risk index shows the predicted vulnerability each Deep South state faces from natural disasters.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *Phase 4.2 Cycle 09 Household Pulse Survey: August 20 - September 16, 2024*, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2024/demo/hhp/cycle09.html>.

¹⁶ *Atlas of Accountability*, <https://rebuildbydesign.org/atlas-of-disaster>.

¹⁷ FEMA | *National Risk Index*, <https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/data-resources>.



Impacts on the Electoral and Political System

Natural disasters pose a significant threat to participation in the electoral process. A poorly timed storm or fire could destroy someone's ability to provide necessary documentation to vote, displace populations, or even make going to the polls an unsafe or overly time-intensive process. Disasters that destroy property and displace people will also upend people's lives, leaving them with little time to participate in the political process, acquire information, or have the time to go to the polls.

This is exceptionally problematic as people displaced or without housing are those most in need of governmental action and support from their elected officials. The lack of resources is further



exacerbated by the potential cuts in electoral participation rates. In state or countywide races, areas heavily impacted by natural disasters will have lower voter participation rates, which can easily alter the outcomes of elections. To the extent that the impact on voting rates can impact electoral outcomes, this can lead to years of ramifications across the political sphere and undermine voter will.

Impacts on Social Resilience and Civic Culture

Natural disasters and hazards not only present physical harms and dangers to a community, but their social, economic and psychological impacts can be just as destructive. Polling places are often critical social touchstones within a community. These may include places of worship, recreation centers, schools, libraries, and other important community spaces. The resiliency of these spaces, along with the ability for people to return home, is important for a community's recovery.

The loss or destruction of iconic landmarks presents an additional risk. This is because communities often rally around or center core elements of their identity around significant events or locations. Thus, the loss of such sites may further hinder the capacity for recovery. This makes it worthwhile to invest in increasing the resilience and durability of such sites, as it can serve to protect areas of social interest and aid with cultural and social healing after major disasters. This also provides a mechanism to help further galvanize other aspects of post-disaster recovery.

Investing in these social spaces to ensure they are resilient will aid in recovery, provide intuitive points for offering resources related to relief, and allow for continued economic development within a community. Such spaces also allow for a sense of community to persist, which has added benefits pertaining to the cultivation of social bonds, decreased social instability, and a community's sense of place and self. These elements play a critical role in recovery and can help prevent the significant demographic decline that New Orleans saw after Katrina.

What Can Be Done?

Increased spending on infrastructure resilience would be a primary means of action. Instead of prioritizing plans to relocate polling sites and focusing solely on alternative locations and staffing in the event of a disaster, resilience spending could help prevent the problem. A proactive approach to preventing the impacts of natural disasters will be far more productive than a reactive approach.



The National Institute of Building Sciences estimates that every dollar spent on resilience infrastructure results in \$6 of savings¹⁸ on average. A variety of funding programs are available for local and state governments to acquire the funding necessary to improve their resilience, such as FEMA's Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund and the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI). These programs cover a wide range of infrastructure and community resilience needs, but focusing on places utilized for electoral purposes is not often prioritized in this list.

Realigning some of this spending to prioritize places used as polling sites can help mitigate the potential electoral impacts of natural disasters. Also, emphasizing community spaces, housing, and building codes in minority areas would be beneficial in reducing the chances of displacement by increasingly severe weather. Focusing on community resilience and election infrastructure could increase an applicant's competitiveness for these programs. FEMA notes that for its Revolving Loan Fund¹⁹, it is built to "support mitigation projects at the local government level and increase the nation's resilience to natural hazards."

However, there are limitations with this approach. Due to the significant degree of uncertainty surrounding the federal budget and spending at the time of this writing, these programs may not be well funded, may refuse to pay, or may not exist within the next few months. Therefore, localities may also need to consider other ways to fund their infrastructure resilience.

A second means of addressing the vulnerability of the electoral system to severe weather is to provide the public with alternative means of access to the ballot. Increasing access to mail-in ballots, online voting, early voting, having disaster plans that include backup polling places or extended times of operation, and other tools of ballot access can significantly reduce the impact that natural disasters have on the electoral process. Also, displaced voters could benefit from similar mechanisms as active-duty military for accessing the ballot or registering for elections. This has been previously considered with the Displaced Citizens Voter Protection Act of 2005 (HR 3734)²⁰, though this legislation failed to advance to a vote. This could have been beneficial to the displaced New Orleanians forced to bus in from out of state to vote immediately post-Katrina.

Overall, the electoral impacts of Katrina are still felt today, making election resiliency a priority as major storms become more frequent. The population and demographic changes in New

¹⁸ Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves Interim Report*, 2018, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_mitsaves-factsheet_2018.pdf.

¹⁹ FEMA, *Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund Program*, <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/learn/storm-rlf>.

²⁰ *H.R. 3734 - 109th Congress (2005-2006): Displaced Citizens Voter Protection Act of 2005*, September 2005, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/109th-congress/house-bill/3734>.



Orleans and Louisiana impact minority representation today in the state legislature and Congress — particularly Louisiana’s 2nd Congressional District. More effective means to access the ballot would have helped recovery and preserved a New Orleans community where all people can thrive.

How to effect change?

- Invest more funding in polling sites, precinct officials and election infrastructure, making them more resilient to and nimble during natural disasters.
- Protect democracy by providing voters with extended registration deadlines, adequate notice for postponed elections, and extending absentee and early voting at alternate locations to accommodate residents displaced by weather crises.

Chair LEE. If there is no further business, I thank the Members for their participation, and, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:53 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

