

WISCONSIN ELECTIONS COMMISSION

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DATE: August 22, 2018

TO: Wisconsin County Clerks
Wisconsin Municipal Clerks
City of Milwaukee Election Commission
Milwaukee County Election Commission
Wisconsin Municipal Governing Bodies
Wisconsin County Boards

FROM: Meagan Wolfe
Interim Administrator, Wisconsin Elections Commission

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Election Security Team, Wisconsin Elections Commission

SUBJECT: Election Security Awareness

The Wisconsin Elections Commission recognizes the importance of election security and how it is essential to administering elections that are free, fair, and efficient. With more than 1,800 local election officials, Wisconsin has a unique election administration system whose success is dependent on cooperation between election partners from all levels of government. It is vital that all elected officials in the state continue to recognize the important role that safe and secure elections play in our state and support our local election officials in their duties of conducting and administering elections in their communities.

In 2016, state computer systems were targeted by foreign actors in an attempt to access sensitive voter information housed in the WisVote voter registration database and election management system. Employees with the Department of Enterprise Technology quickly recognized the attempt and prevented any unauthorized access to voter information. The security threats that Wisconsin successfully prevented in 2016 will persist, and WEC staff are actively working to prevent any unauthorized attempts to access elections infrastructure in the future and to keep all aspects of election administration secure.

In March of 2018, the U.S. Congress allocated new Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grant funds to state elections agencies to be used to secure elections. Wisconsin was one of the grant recipients, and the WEC has used these funds to increase our election security efforts and upgrade information technology infrastructure to better prevent and detect threats. In addition to continuing the agency's previous tasks concerning election security, WEC staff has created a series of training videos to encourage cybersecurity best practices, published new manuals and documents to support clerks in implementing election security best practices in their offices, and created an interactive election security tabletop exercise program.

The election security training program that was created by WEC staff was conducted across the state for county clerks. In order to ensure that all local election officials and their staff have access to the security training, county clerks are currently conducting the training with their municipal clerks. A key aspect of the training was to gauge what various clerks were already doing to keep our elections secure, and many clerks have implemented some of the following best practices:

- Have voting equipment and associated memory devices stored in a secure and locked area between elections
 - Allowing only members of the clerk's staff to have access to these secure areas
 - Instituting a Chain of Custody document to show when and who accessed the secure areas
- Attend trainings to learn about new election security initiatives
- Secure additional access to IT resources or collaborate with existing IT resources to prevent cybersecurity incidents on the local level
- Coordinate with their emergency management teams to discuss contingency plans in the event of an election security incident
- Have updated technological resources (such as new computers, improved connections to the Internet, ability to get operating system updates and virus protection, etc.).

While clerks already have processes in place to keep our elections and their offices secure, many clerks also indicated that there was room for improvement. WEC staff recognizes that counties and municipalities have financial constraints that must be considered when making decisions regarding updating computer systems and purchasing other necessary resources to secure elections across the state. We would like to stress the importance of planning for election-related upgrades and encourage continued conversations with clerks about their resource needs.

All elected officeholders in the State of Wisconsin benefit from the work and efforts of our local clerks and their staff. Wisconsin has a vested interest in making sure that they have the support and access to reasonable resources that they need. As the chief election officials in their areas, the county and municipal clerks of Wisconsin are a vital player in the administration of free, fair, secure and efficient elections. In order for these job duties to be performed, they require continued support from their governing bodies.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission would like to thank you for past support you have provided to your local election officials and encourage you to continue to work with your local elections officials to make sure that they have the tools and resources necessary to continue to keep our elections safe.

If you have any questions regarding the WEC's election security awareness program, please contact the Help Desk at 608-261-2028, or elections@wi.gov.