



OKLAHOMA STATE ELECTION BOARD

August 13, 2021

Letter from Paul Ziriach, Secretary of the Oklahoma State Election Board

To the Honorable Members of the Oklahoma Senate and Oklahoma House of Representatives,

As Oklahoma's chief election official, no one is more committed to the security and integrity of our state's elections than I am. Today, I am writing to provide you with information to assure you – and your constituents – that Oklahoma's elections are, indeed, free, fair, safe and secure.

OKLAHOMA'S STATEWIDE VOTING SYSTEM

The State of Oklahoma (via the State Election Board) owns and controls the entire voting system – from the eScan A/T ballot scanners manufactured by Hart InterCivic to the computers used to program elections and tabulate votes to the custom voter registration and election management system.

In fact, the Oklahoma Legislature has mandated in state law that Oklahoma must conduct elections utilizing a “unitary, unified, integrated system of election administration for the State of Oklahoma that includes an electronic data processing system for maintenance of voter registration records, certification of election results and other election-related applications, and the installation of electronic, optical scanning voting devices compatible with the same system in every precinct polling place.” (See [26 O.S. § 21-101](#).) **This means that Oklahoma uses the same voting devices, the same ballots, and the same standards for conducting elections at every precinct in every county in our state.**

ACCURACY

Over and over again, Oklahoma's voting system has proven to accurately count ballots. For example, in the past year, election results (including mail absentee ballots) have been confirmed during recounts requested by candidates in an Edmond City Council election in April 2021 and a State Senator District 5 Republican Runoff in August 2020.

In 2019, the Oklahoma Legislature authorized post-election tabulation audits in Oklahoma. (See [26 O.S. § 3-130](#).) Although the development of a process for these audits was delayed due to the pandemic, the State Election Board is currently testing audit techniques, and in 2022 we plan to implement a system of random, post-election tabulation audits authorized under this law.

SYSTEM SECURITY

State Election Board servers are secured at the Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) “server farm” in Oklahoma City. We work directly with OMES’s [Oklahoma Cyber Command](#) to help safeguard the voting system, the voter registration and election management system, public-facing websites and services, e-mail and other IT infrastructure.

The Secretary of the State Election Board requires state and county election officials to receive regular cyber security and resiliency training. This includes training performed by federal and state security officials as part of the state-mandated election training program.

Oklahoma’s eScan A/T ballot scanners, along with voting system computers used to program voting devices and tabulate results, are not connected to the Internet. Voting system connections between the State Election Board and County Election Boards are made via a secure private network.

There are strict chain of custody requirements employed for voting devices, ballots, and other election equipment. Unauthorized persons are not allowed access to these. We do not contract with outside vendors for preventative maintenance of our voting equipment or for the programming of databases for elections, as happens in many other jurisdictions. In Oklahoma, such work is performed by State Election Board employees.

County election board employees program the voting devices before an election using the election database created and tested at the State Election Board. Every eScan used in every election is thoroughly tested and calibrated during the election preparation process by trained county election board personnel. Only eScans that pass 100% of the testing and calibration are used in an election. Trained staff of the State Election Board and county election boards also perform “Logic and Accuracy” testing prior to every election to ensure ballots are counted correctly.

SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2017, “elections” were designated as “Critical Infrastructure” by the federal government. As a result, numerous state and federal agencies assist election officials in securing our elections.

State agencies and offices such as Oklahoma Cyber Command, the Oklahoma National Guard, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, the Oklahoma Fusion Center, and others, along with representatives of several federal agencies, are part of an election security working group in Oklahoma.

Additionally, the Legislature has created an [exemption](#) for certain election-related IT technology and records from the Open Records Act. This is vital to protecting our system from unscrupulous actors who might try to abuse Oklahoma’s transparency laws to attempt to gain access to critical systems.

Oklahoma Cyber Command has assigned a cyber security analyst to work directly with election officials at the State Election Board and county election boards on cyber security matters, and has also designated a team of cyber security engineers to help us protect our elections in Oklahoma.

Most importantly, in the event a suspected cyber incident were to occur related to Oklahoma’s election system, Oklahoma Cyber Command would lead a robust, multi-agency investigation.

BIPARTISANSHIP OF OKLAHOMA’S ELECTION SYSTEM

Perhaps one of the most effective security features of Oklahoma’s voting system is the requirement for bipartisanship contained in state law – from the membership of the State Election Board and each County Election Board, to the partisan make-up of precinct officials and nursing home Absentee Voting Boards.

These are not random people administering our elections – these are our friends, family and neighbors. By law, Oklahoma’s two largest political parties provide a list of registered voters to serve at every level of election administration. Therefore, when you vote on Election Day at your local polling place, at least one of the three precinct officials is a Democrat and one is a Republican. (Registered independents and members of other recognized parties are also eligible to be appointed as precinct officials.)

When an Absentee Voting Board visits a nursing home to deliver absentee ballots requested by residents there, one is a Republican and one is a Democrat. When the County Election Board or the State Election Board certifies election results, these boards include members nominated by their political party. Additionally, [Watchers](#) may be commissioned by a candidate or a recognized political party in Oklahoma to observe the setup and closing of precincts on Election Day.

Standardized training ensures that precinct officials and bipartisan county election board members have been given the knowledge and resources to properly conduct the election in accordance to the law. Likewise, county election board secretaries and staff receive regular training in accordance with state law.

This built-in, bipartisan oversight of the election process helps protect the integrity of our elections by ensuring both major political parties are represented at every level.

ELECTION INTEGRITY LAWS

The Oklahoma State Legislature has exercised its authority under [Article 3, Section 4 of the Oklahoma Constitution](#) to enact numerous election integrity laws to “detect and punish fraud.” In my opinion, Oklahoma’s laws strike a good balance, helping to ensure that voting is easy while also making sure cheating is hard.

A few examples of these laws include:

- Proof of identity – whether voting in person or by absentee ballot.
- Voters must request and return their own absentee ballots.
- Ballots are secured, and a strict chain of custody is maintained through the certification of the election. Both paper ballots and printed vote tallies are secured by the county sheriff on election night until the election results are certified.
- It is unlawful for election results to be known or released prior to 7:00 p.m. on Election Day.
- Any candidate may request a recount of his or her election by filing a petition and posting a deposit.
- Fraud and suppression are serious crimes which carry strict punishments for those found guilty.

Thankfully, Oklahoma’s election integrity laws help ensure that voting fraud, voter registration fraud, and voter suppression are rare in our state. Even so, suspected election law violations are required to be reported by election officials to the District Attorney. (For the 2020 General Election, about 60 such suspected violations were identified and reported – out of more than 1.5 million voters.) It is my sincere hope that the few bad actors are held accountable for their attempts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In a letter such as this, it is not possible to list every aspect of protections that Oklahoma has in place for our elections. Therefore, I would like to refer you to these additional resources that you may find informative or useful:

- Election Security information on the State Election Board’s website: <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/security-integrity/election-security.html>
- Testimony of Paul Ziriak, Secretary, Oklahoma State Election Board, regarding election security before the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee on Research and Technology (June 25, 2019): <https://science.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Ziriak%20Testimony.pdf> (written testimony); <https://science.house.gov/hearings/election-security-voting-technology-vulnerabilities> (video)

- OMES “Get Stuff Done” video podcast, where State Election Board Secretary Paul Zirix and Oklahoma Chief Information Security Officer Matt Singleton discussed Oklahoma’s efforts to successfully secure the 2020 elections (January 27, 2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVvcOYbllTs>.
- Voting System information on the State Election Board’s website: <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/security-integrity/voting-devices.html>
- Trusted Info page on the State Election Board’s website: <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/media/trustedinfo.html>
- Historic election results from the State Election Board’s website: <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/elections-results/election-results.html>
- Current and historic voter registration statistics from the State Election Board’s website: <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/voter-registration/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-statistics-archive.html>
- State Election Board meeting agendas and minutes from the State Election Board’s website: <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/about-us/2021-agendas-and-minutes.html>
- Oklahoma Cyber Command’s notice to the public of certain breaches to state IT systems: <https://cybersecurity.ok.gov/breaches>.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to acknowledge that a number of you have reached out to me in recent weeks after hearing from some of your constituents who raised concerns about the veracity of the results of the 2020 General Election. My office, too, has been contacted by many of these same individuals.

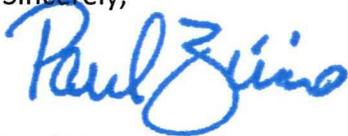
Unfortunately, it appears that most of the concerns expressed about Oklahoma’s elections have been influenced by innuendo and misinformation. **Thankfully, given Oklahoma’s robust election integrity and security laws and procedures, it is safe to say that these fears are unfounded.**

Some of these individuals have requested a so-called “forensic audit” of the 2020 General Election in Oklahoma based on the misinformation they have seen or heard. However, such “forensic audits” have not been authorized by law, and would also create an unnecessary expense. **Furthermore, a “forensic audit” is not necessary, because if a breach or cyber incident involving Oklahoma’s election system had occurred, Oklahoma Cyber Command and its state and federal partners would have *already* conducted a *full investigation* into the matter, at my behest, with the full cooperation of election officials.**

To be clear, there is not now, nor has there been, any credible evidence that a cyber breach or cyber incident occurred involving Oklahoma's election system.

I am honored to serve as Oklahoma's chief election official. I am very proud of our Oklahoma election system and the dedication to free and fair elections exhibited by our state's election officials. We have one of the most accurate and secure voting systems anywhere in the entire world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Ziriach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "P".

Paul Ziriach, Secretary
Oklahoma State Election Board