

**Questions for the Record from Senator Charles E. Grassley for the Honorable Jocelyn Benson, Secretary of State of Michigan**  
**“Protecting Our Democracy’s Frontline Workers”**  
**August 3, 2022**

1. In your spoken testimony, you testified that questioning the integrity of an election erodes our democratic process and is linked to the heightened threats against election officials (03:05:10, 03:08:57). In your written testimony, you stated that “[t]hese threats are a direct extension of the efforts to spread false information about the security and accuracy of our elections that we’ve all endured since the polls closed on November 3, 2020.”

A. Stacey Abrams, in response to her 2018 loss in the Georgia gubernatorial election, made several statements questioning the results of that election, including: “I’m here to tell you a secret that makes Breitbart and Tucker Carlson go crazy: We won. I am not delusional.” (<https://www.nationalreview.com/the-morning-jolt/hillary-clintons-bad-habit-of-questioning-election-results-has-spread-to-all-democrats/>). She also said “You see, I’m supposed to say nice things and accept my fate. They will complain that I should not use this moment to recap what was done wrong or to demand a remedy,” she said. “And I will not concede because the erosion of our democracy is not right.” (<https://www.npr.org/2020/11/18/935734198/trump-hasnt-conceded-georgia-neither-did-stacey-abrams-what-changed>).

i. Would you agree that these fraudulent statements made by Stacey Abrams erode the democratic process?

B. Hillary Clinton, following her loss of the 2016 presidential election to Donald Trump, later made statements questioning the integrity of those results, including: “there are lots of questions about its legitimacy[.]” (<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/11/hillary-clinton-on-trumps-election-there-are-lots-of-questions-about-its-legitimacy/>). She also said “the Russians were in the county election systems of every county in Florida.” (<https://time.com/5578267/florida-election-interference-russia-clinton/>).

i. Would you agree that these fraudulent statements made by Hillary Clinton erode the democratic process?

2. You have several fundraising websites through ActBlue at <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/sosbenson>, [https://secure.actblue.com/donate/pccc\\_bp\\_jocelynbenson](https://secure.actblue.com/donate/pccc_bp_jocelynbenson), [https://secure.actblue.com/donate/pccc\\_2022\\_jocelynbenson\\_only?refcode=TW](https://secure.actblue.com/donate/pccc_2022_jocelynbenson_only?refcode=TW), and <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/jocelynbenson>. As expressed by Senator Tillis during the Senate Judiciary Hearing on July 26, 2022—“Law Enforcement Officer Safety:

Protecting Those Who Protect and Serve”

(<https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/meetings/law-enforcement-officer-safety-protecting-those-who-protect-and-serve>), ActBlue hosts a website hosting something called “13.12: Run for Justice” (<https://secure.actblue.com/donate/1312run>). On that website, it states “Why 13.12 miles? 1312 = ACAB = All Cops Are Bastards. Every mile you run is a dollar for Black Lives Matter to use in their mission of dismantling white supremacy and defunding the police.”

- A. Do you agree with ActBlue’s support of a run symbolizing “All Cops Are Bastards”?
  - i. If not, are you willing to denounce this message and demand that ActBlue remove its support for this hateful message?
- B. Do you agree with the mission to “defund the police”?
  - i. If not, are you willing to denounce this message and demand that ActBlue remove its support for this hateful message?

**Response:**

Thank you for your concern for election officials and election workers. We carry out our duties of office in a nonpartisan and professional manner, committed to protecting the integrity of American elections and the voting rights of every eligible citizen, no matter where they live or who they vote for.

But right now we are facing an unrelenting attack of harassment and threats. Enduring these threats creates a near constant strain of anxiety and stress on our work. And these threats are a direct extension of the efforts to spread false information about the security and accuracy of our elections that we’ve all endured since the polls closed on November 3, 2020. I condemn all misinformation that seeks to mislead voters about the legitimate outcome of an election, and the coordinated and unprecedented attack on elections carried out since 2020 is especially pernicious.

Through blatantly false press releases, purely political legislative hearings, bogus legal claims and so called “affidavits” that failed to allege any clear evidence of wrongdoing, those unhappy with the results of the 2020 presidential election have perpetuated a deceitful and dangerous campaign to erode the public’s confidence in one of the most secure, accessible, and transparent elections in our history. And now that effort is being supported by political candidates who are courting the support and coveted endorsements of the people perpetuating those dangerous theories.

The targets are all of us – Republican, Democratic and independent election officials alike – many working in small towns and cities and rural counties in every state in this country. They do not have Capitol Police watching over them, nor can they or their jurisdictions afford private security officers to protect them and their families. They are regular people, our neighbors and community members, civil servants who drive themselves to town hall meetings, who go back and forth to their offices and homes, often dropping off or picking up children and groceries along the way. And as they go about the daily activities that so many of us take for granted, they are being threatened.

The result of the threats and harassment is that one in three election officials reports feeling unsafe on a regular basis and more than half fear for the safety of their colleagues in future elections. Twenty percent now say it is unlikely they will continue serving as election officials through 2024. Sadly, they have good reason to feel unsafe and to consider leaving their vocations. As we saw on January 6, 2021, at the United States Capitol, and again this month at the FBI field office in Cincinnati, misinformation can and does lead to violence, even against law enforcement officers who have sworn an oath to protect our country. I believe violence has no place in our political discourse, and should never be utilized or threatened against public officials, be they law enforcement officers or election administrators.

I testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee to carry precisely this message from Republican, Democratic and independent election officials across the country. The threats and harassment of election workers must stop before it prompts additional violence and completely undermines American democracy.

To protect election officials and democracy, my request of committee members is that you take the following actions:

- Amend and pass the Election Worker and Polling Place Protection Act to impose strong penalties on those who threaten or harm anyone involved in election administration.
- Limit access to those seeking the personal information of election officials, banning it from being shared by those seeking to dox or otherwise harass election officials at their homes, in much the same way the Daniel Aderl Judicial Security and Privacy Act, which you co-sponsor, would protect federal judges and their families.
- Prohibit sitting elected officials from threatening the arrest or prosecution of election officials.
- And finally, provide significant resources to protect elections and election officials.

I firmly believe that we can emerge from this moment with a stronger democracy than ever before if we work together as people of integrity, Republicans, Democrats and independents, committed to protecting our elections and our republic. As national leaders on the Senate Judiciary Committee, you could begin this shift in American discourse by assuming a bipartisan spirit of cooperation, the same spirit local election officials use to perform their work in communities nationwide, to carry our nation through a critical and dangerous moment, and demonstrating that you, too, are willing to put country over party to save democracy.

Thank you again for your concern for election officials across the nation, and for considering our requests for support.

**Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing**  
**“Protecting Our Democracy’s Frontline Workers”**  
**Questions for the Record**  
**for Hon. Jocelyn Benson**  
**Submitted August 10, 2022**

**QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR SHELDON WHITEHOUSE**

1. How has your work and your life been affected by public officials trafficking in falsehoods about the legitimacy of the 2020 election?
2. In your view, has the campaign of falsehood about the legitimacy of the 2020 election had a role in causing election officials to leave the workforce? Please explain.
3. Do you see a link between falsehoods about the 2020 election and threats and violence against election officials? Please explain.
4. Do you see signs of orchestration and purpose around the campaign of falsehood about the legitimacy of the 2020 election? Please explain.

**Response:**

Thank you for your correspondence and concern for the safety of election officials. Right now we are facing an unprecedented wave of continuous, unrelenting harassment and threats. Enduring these threats creates a near constant strain of anxiety and stress on our work.

I’ve experienced these threats firsthand, most notoriously in December 2020, just a few weeks after Michigan’s Board of State Canvassers certified the results of the 2020 presidential election. At close to 9 p.m. on a Saturday night I was about to put my son to bed when the peace, serenity, and spirit of the evening was broken as dozens of individuals descended upon our home.

In a scene that would repeat in greater magnitude and escalate towards violent ends one month later here at the United States Capitol, these men and women shouted for me to come outside so that they could confront me about the results of the 2020 presidential election, results that the votes – and the will – of Michigan voters had made abundantly clear.

These threats are a direct extension of the efforts to spread false information about the security and accuracy of our elections that we’ve all endured since the polls closed on November 3, 2020. Through blatantly false press releases, purely political legislative hearings, bogus legal claims and so called “affidavits” that failed to allege any clear evidence of wrongdoing, those unhappy with the results of the 2020 presidential election have perpetuated an unprecedented, coordinate campaign to erode the public’s confidence in one of the most secure, accessible, and transparent elections in our history. And now that effort is being supported by political candidates who are courting the support and coveted endorsements of the people perpetuating those dangerous theories.

The targets are all of us – Republican, Democratic and independent election officials alike – many working in small towns and cities and rural counties in every state in this country. They do not have capitol police watching over them, nor can they or their jurisdictions afford private security officers to protect them and their families. They are regular people, our neighbors and community members, civil servants who drive themselves to town hall meetings, who go back and forth to their offices and homes, often dropping off or picking up children and groceries along the way. And as they go about the daily activities that so many of us take for granted, they are being threatened. Of those who have received those threats, nearly three in four have been threatened over the phone, and more than half have been threatened in person by their potential attacker.

Members of my own staff are among the election professionals who have been under constant pressure and strain beginning in 2020 and continuing through this election cycle. Preparing for, educating the public about and implementing an election has always been stressful work, but now people on my team are also enduring death threats and other harassment. The anxiety this creates cannot be overstated, and some members of my team are considering leaving the field and what they have always considered their vocation.

The same trend is playing out nationally, as one in three election officials reports feeling unsafe on a regular basis and more than half fear for the safety of their colleagues in future elections. Twenty percent now say it is unlikely they will continue serving as election officials through 2024, which every indication suggests will be yet another contested election cycle. Why? Because they believe too many political leaders are attacking the system that they know is fair and honest.

Our nation stands to lose a great deal if we continue to push honest, high-integrity election officials from their posts. Not only will we lose countless years of experience and wisdom, in many cases the people seeking to replace them have expressed a willingness to overturn the outcome of future elections if their preferred candidate loses. They would likely also use their offices to make it harder for eligible American citizens to vote, and inject misinformation, uncertainty, and confusion into the election process so that even if election results are upheld, enough citizens will consider the election and the elected leaders illegitimate, making it impossible to govern and increasing the potential for violence.

So, with the midterm elections just months away, I ask that you:

- Amend and pass the Election Worker and Polling Place Protection Act to impose strong penalties on those who threaten or harm anyone involved in election administration.
- Limit access to those seeking the personal information of election officials, banning it from being shared by those seeking to dox or otherwise harass election officials at their homes.
- Prohibit sitting elected officials from threatening the arrest or prosecution of election officials.
- And finally, provide significant resources to protect elections and election officials.

If, as national leaders, you assume a bipartisan spirit of cooperation, the same spirit local election officials use to perform their work in communities nationwide, you will not only carry our nation through a critical and dangerous moment, you will also demonstrate that you are willing to put country over party to save democracy. And right now, that's a message that all Americans need to hear.