

Chairman Durban, Ranking Member Grassley, and Members of the Committee on the Judiciary,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit my testimony for the record. My name is Christopher Piper and I served as the Chief Election Official for the Commonwealth of Virginia upon my appointment by Governor Ralph Northam as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Elections in February 2018 until April 2022. Prior to my service as Commissioner, I proudly held the titles of Election Services Manager from 2011 to 2014 and Campaign Finance Manager from 2003 to 2008 at that very same agency. My time in these roles exposed me to thousands of election officials over the years and have witnessed how transformed their jobs have been in just the past 19 years.

Election officials have generally shun the spotlight. A successfully run election meant that no one noticed how much work went in to ensuring its success. In short, a well run election was largely determined by how little attention was paid to the actual administration of the election.

Those days are long gone. Now, these officials are subject to threats of violence motivated by unfounded claims and a general lack of understanding about how elections are run. Every action is scrutinized and lies are spread about innocuous actions.

While I have not received any direct threats during my time as Commissioner, I did recognize the threats being made at my colleagues around the country.

In 2021, Virginia along with North Carolina, were the only states to conduct a statewide gubernatorial election. And most eyes were focused on the Virginia campaign. Throughout the summer, as state and local election officials were making preparations for a successful election, offices around the state, including the state office, reported groups requesting a large amount of data and documents utilizing Virginia's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The requests were so many that offices reported they were unable to prepare for the election because the majority of the time was spent fulfilling FOIA requests. At the same time this was occurring, offices were also being contacted by groups who wanted to interview the local election officials, record those interviews, and post them on their website.

These and other groups were also actively recruiting what Virginia calls "Authorized Observers".

Given the threats my colleagues had observed, local election officials and myself were very concerned about these groups as they were motivated by the same lies about the 2020 election as were those making violent threats.

In September 2021 just before the start of early voting, I was made aware of a post on the social media site "Telegram". The post came from a group who I recognized as one of the group's interviewing registrars and recruiting authorized observers and making numerous FOIA requests. The post included my official state portrait with the action item (paraphrased from memory),

"Who is BOE Commissioner CHRIS PIPER? It's time to shed some light on the players behind VA Elections. What is Chris's job, what is his background, what was his role in the 2020 elections? Why did he threaten to engage law enforcement and social media against citizens asking questions about the VA election? DIG UP EVERYTHING."

While clearly not a direct threat, it concerned me greatly. I forwarded the post to law enforcement and began talks with Virginia's Capitol Police about what to do if a direct threat were to be received and if I was eligible for 24 hour security should it be needed.

That evening, I went home to my wife and 15 year old daughter to let them know that security around the house may be needed in the coming months. I also called my son who was away at college to make him aware. While we never discussed further than that, it was a sobering conversation and one I never thought I would have as an election official.

I am incredibly grateful for the fact that I never did have to experience any direct threats against me and that no such threats were reported by any state or local election official in Virginia. But every election official is acutely aware of the threats made to our colleagues and it weighs on us every day because we never know if we are next. Like the rest of the country, Virginia has recently experienced a great deal of turnover at the director and staff level in local election offices. Virginia does not track the reasons, but anecdotally I have heard that many are worried about their safety and that the work no longer feels satisfying because the basic administration of an election has become politicized.