

To Senator Durbin, Senator Grassley, Members of the Committee on the Judiciary, and to the American people....

My name is Grace Bannasch and I am the elected Town Clerk in Shutesbury Massachusetts, which means I am a chief local election official. I started working in this office in 2019 as an Assistant Town Clerk and was elected to the position of Town Clerk on June 27 2020. I wear many hats as a Town Clerk. Most local election officials are not *only* election officials, and there is no better example of that dynamic than the office I currently occupy in rural New England. In addition to being the chief local election official in my town, I am also the Records Access Officer, and the Ethics Commission Liaison, and the Town Archivist. Notary Public, Burial Agent, and Registrar. Certifications and attestations, swearing in and accepting resignations, emptying mouse traps and coordinating public communications in the event of natural disasters. Dog tags, raffle permits, trash bags and transfer station stickers, birth and marriage and death certificates, that's all me. Minutes and agendas and consequent records, that's me too. My office is closest to the front door in our Town Hall, my phone number is the first one you find on our municipal website. I am the one they call when they forget the login information for the committee Zoom account, I am the one they call when their parent has passed and when their child is born, I am the one they call when they are on the other side of the country and worried that a flooding river has washed away their absentee ballot, or when they are in the middle of the ocean and unsure how to get an absentee ballot in the first place. Being that person, being a Town Clerk, is my honor and my privilege. Like most election professionals, I stumbled into this line of work by pure random happenstance. And as the vast majority of my colleagues would agree, election work has been hands down the best job I've ever discovered.

Shutesbury (not Shrewsbury, a frequent mix-up) is a small town in Western Massachusetts that you almost certainly have never heard of. Perched on a hilltop that used to be a mountain before the glaciers came and went, our primary claims to fame are participating in Shay's Rebellion, a lovely family-friendly state-run public

beach at Lake Wyola, and all the incredible brilliant people who have made our community their home. All elections in Massachusetts are administered at the municipal level, as opposed to being administered at the county level, and in small towns like ours voting is truly a communal event. As of June 8 2022, the Town of Shutesbury had 1,790 total residents and 1,527 total registered voters. The fact that 85% of our town is registered to vote is a reflection of how seriously Shutesburians take our individual right to vote. Civic participation is an important part of our hilltown culture and it is how we show care for our neighbors and our forest.

Shutesbury is a hand-count paper ballot town. Our voting booths are wooden cubbies made with love by local residents. On Election Days we have a bake sale to raise money for the library or the elementary school. Our town is small enough that we only have the one precinct, in the basement of Town Hall. This is where we all vote, and it is where we have always voted. The best part of Election Day in our town is the ballot box. Constructed in, and in use since 1934, our wooden crank-turn ballot box is like the grandmother of the town. A ticker on the front of the box counts the number of ballots that have been cast. A panel on the top lifts up to reveal the slot into which a voter places their ballot, and there is a crank on the side that wheels the ballot through a clockwork mechanism within, dropping the ballot into a compartment at the bottom of the box. As the crank turns and the number ticks up and the ballot falls, there is a bell that goes *ding*. That sound is how you know your ballot was cast, and that your civic duty is fulfilled.

Shutesbury is also my hometown. It is where I grew up, and it is where I have chosen to make my life as an adult. The connection I have with this community is important, because without it I'm not sure I would still be a Town Clerk, after all we have been through these last few years.

I have received death threats. I have picked up the phone and been screamed at by strangers from out of state who knew my first and last name. I have found flyers posted near my office claiming that the outcome of the 2020 presidential

election was a Jewish plot. I have opened our ballot drop box to find it stuffed with crumbled Chinese restaurant take out menus. Some of these incidents I reported to law enforcement, some I have kept between myself and my daily notes until this moment.

I have been harassed, along with every other local election official in the country, by predatory records requests inspired by the Big Lie. I consider a records request to be predatory when it is A) implicitly or overtly hostile, B) is asking either partially or wholly for records that obviously do not exist or would not be public, and C) is submitted successively or simultaneously by to multiple election offices. Predatory records requests function similar to a Distributed Denial of Service attack, overwhelming local election offices and bringing all other services to a grinding halt.

Over the last two years, I have become a walking talking encyclopedia of election esoterica. Polling shows that Americans are more likely to trust their local election officials over other authorities and my own personal experience bares that out. As much rage as I have faced from outside my community, I have responded to more fear from within it. People are scared that their vote won't count. People are scared they'll be falsely accused of voter fraud if they make the most innocent mistake. So I help and I teach, and I do the research and I talk to the lawyers. I honestly love doing it but at the same time it breaks my heart, because no one should be made to feel scared of voting in the first place.

Voting is not a crime, voting is a right. Election administrators guarantee that right, protect your votes, and we deserve to be protected in the performance of our duties.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Grace Bannasch, Shutesbury Town Clerk