



State of Vermont
Office of the Secretary of State
128 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-1101

[phone] 802-828-2363
<https://sos.vermont.gov>

James C. Condos, Secretary of State
Christopher D. Winters, Deputy Secretary

Protecting Our Democracy's Frontline Workers

By Jim Condos
Secretary of State
Vermont

June 9, 2022

In the over 30 years that I have been in public service, I have never seen the political discourse in our country become as divisive as it is today. While there has always been political disagreement between, and even within, the Parties, I can't recall a time where the very foundations of our democracy, including our fair and free elections, were called into question.

Rewind to less than a year and a half ago, when we watched in horror as armed insurrectionists violently stormed our capitol.

At the core of their actions was a single insidious lie that even today threatens to do irreparable harm to our democratic process: ***the lie that our elections are not conducted fairly and with integrity***. A lie that widespread voter fraud not only exists, but altered the outcome of the election. The proponents of this lie have yet to produce a single shred of evidence to back it up.

Yet, across the country, and even in my small state of Vermont, the fallout from this lie has placed federal, state, and local election workers in the crosshairs.

Our election officials are professional public servants who work diligently to make our democracy accessible to voters, and to ensure the official results accurately reflect the votes cast by eligible Americans. From volunteer poll workers up to Chief Election officials such as myself.

Now, they are receiving death threats, violent, lewd or otherwise disturbing phone calls and letters, and in some extreme cases, actual attempts of violence.

Here in Vermont in late 2020 and in 2021, my staff received a series of phone calls threatening execution by firing squad, with continual threats like "your time is up" and "they're coming for you."

One staff member needed to take a leave of absence (approximately 10 weeks) from work to receive treatment for PTSD-like symptoms as a result of this experience and other less severe, but still challenging and impactful ones like it.

No election workers should have to fear for their life just for doing their job in service of our democracy.

I want to make clear, while we felt this particular series of calls rose to the level of reporting to our law enforcement partners, my office has received many, many other hostile or derogatory phone calls on this issue.

To my knowledge, the threats we received are still under investigation.

The process did reveal to us that state law was inadequate to address this circumstance. Since then, the Legislature has passed a bill, S.265 (signed into law as Act 103), which creates specific criminal penalties for threatening election officials, candidates, or public officials.

However, more can be done nationally, starting with more and sustainable resources to adequately fund election administration. The scrutiny placed on our elections is immense, which is not a bad thing alone, however we need the funds and support to ensure we have the tools and expertise, alongside the ability to recruit election workers, to get the job done. The smallest of errors are magnified considerably while under the microscope.

One of the most important and disconcerting issues we face is misinformation and disinformation. We are bombarded in emails, phone calls, and social media as well as public comments with downright lies perpetuated by elected officials and appointed officials who should and do know better.

Thank you for your attention on this important matter. Our jobs are made significantly harder when staff and election officials are fearful for their lives. No public servant should ever have to experience that.

Sincerely,



James C. Condos
Secretary of State