



vote!

"Protecting Our Democracy's Frontline Workers"

Julie Wise

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King County, Washington

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

The business of election administration has always been a dynamic one, marked by both excitement and unpredictable challenges. We have always welcomed questions from skeptical voters, confronted (sometimes valid) criticism from election watchers, and fought to tell the story of the importance and validity of our work. However, in my more than twenty years as an election official, never have I witnessed a landscape like the one we've faced in the wake of the 2020 presidential election.

Increasingly, we appear to have lost any collective agreement on observable facts and evidence. There doesn't seem to be any amount of information or data we can provide to assuage the swirling mis-, mal- and dis-information out there. Prior to 2020 we typically had a handful of public records requests every year. We had more than fifty in 2021 and are on track to easily eclipse that this year. Requests also tend to be significantly more complicated and require far more legal consultation because they often include sensitive and legally protected information. Our bill with our Prosecuting Attorney has more than doubled and we've had to bring on a new, full-time staff member just to handle all the records requests.

We've also seen an unprecedented number of observers on our ballot processing floor. Since 2020, King County Elections has trained 244 observers, and in 2021 alone, 329 unique observers spent time at our facility. For the first time we've also seen wide-scale efforts to observe all of our 74 ballot drop boxes not only on election night, but also during our daily ballot pick-ups that start two weeks before election day. And while many observers continue to come away from the experience impressed and re-assured by the many layers of security and accountability we have in place, the tone of the questions and interactions has changed dramatically.

My staff are tired. They are tired of having their integrity questioned. They're tired of having observers hovering over their shoulder, filming them, and making accusations while they are just trying to do their job. They're tired of having to respond to emails, calls, tweets and Facebook messages that accuse them of corruption and fraud. They're tired of feeling like their hard work, long hours, and profound dedication are not appreciated. And it's absolutely taken a toll. We're seeing higher turnover, a downward-trend in engagement scores, and a general malaise that I know election officials across the country would easily recognize.

Many are also scared. While we're lucky not to have received direct credible threats like many election administrators across the country, we have felt the need to take proactive measures. To ensure the

safety of my staff and voters we've made changes like implementing round-the-clock security at our headquarters during every election; we've doubled-down on training for skills like de-escalation; and we've coordinated closely with local law enforcement across the county to ensure that we have the right contacts and preparedness plans in place should a serious event occur.

I don't know what the answer is. We will continue to work on new and creative ways to fight misinformation and conspiracy theories. We will continue to answer every observer question in hopes of turning skeptics into advocates, or at least tentative believers. But I do know that we are at a critical moment in this country's democracy and whatever we can do to safeguard and support our election systems and the passionate and tenacious individuals who run them, is worth it.

Thank you,



Julie Wise
Director