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MAGGIE TOULOUSE OLIVER
SECRETARY OF STATE

Hon. Maggie Toulouse Oliver, New Mexico Secretary of State
Statement Before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
“Protecting Our Democracy’s Frontline Workers”
August 3, 2022

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the committee,

My name is Maggie Toulouse Oliver and I serve as New Mexico’s Secretary of State, my state’s chief elections officer. Thank you for having me here today and for organizing this hearing on how we can protect our nation’s election administrators from threats and intimidation.

The work of election administration in the United States is conducted at the state, county, and local levels by civil servants who come to work every day to do their duty keeping the engine of our democracy running. This work is vital to how we elect our leaders and how we organize our way of life, but its legitimacy is being threatened.

Election administration might seem somewhat simple from the voter’s perspective – you register, fill out a ballot a couple times a year, view the results, and that’s pretty much it. Conducting elections, however, is a complex, continual process with highly technical components that ensure accuracy in results and overall security. These technical aspects – like software for vote tabulation machines, the distribution of secured ballot dropboxes, or the use of mailed ballots, to name only a few – have



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become the foundation of false narratives that call into question the integrity of our entire democratic process. Our nation's election workers have been caught in the crossfire and have themselves become the targets of harassment and threats.

Lies and misinformation about how America's elections are run and about the people who run them have proliferated to an unprecedented degree since 2020. Among a significant portion of the country the continuous drumbeat of these lies has created an atmosphere of distrust in our elections and our election officials.

Many people now believe that our country's highest office is occupied by an illegitimate president. Many people now believe that our entire election infrastructure is corrupted and has been weaponized to exclusively favor one political party. Many people now believe that election administration practices that serve to increase access and security – like secured ballot drop boxes, air-gapped vote counting systems, vote-by-mail, and the ministerial certification of election results, to name only a few – are part of a vast conspiracy meant to undermine our entire American way of life.

Of course, these things are not true and no one has ever produced a shred of evidence to support such wildly conspiratorial claims. But the consequences of these lies have real world impacts, especially for election officials. A Benenson Strategy Group [poll](#) taken earlier this year polled 600 election officials and found that more than half were concerned about their colleagues' safety, with nearly one in three saying they know a colleague who has quit because of safety concerns.



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For people who believe their government is corrupt and their leaders are not legitimate, threats of physical violence and acts of intimidation have, sadly, begun to seem like acceptable responses.

In New Mexico, the conspiracies about our voting and election systems have gripped a certain portion of the electorate and have caused people to take action. During the 2020 election cycle, I was doxxed and had to leave my home for weeks under state police protection. My office has since had to utilize services for both me and members of my staff that prevent doxxing by removing personal identifying information from the internet.

Since 2020 my office has seen an uptick in social media trolling, aggrieved emails and calls into our office, and other communications that parrot the misinformation circulating widely in the national discourse.

But more recently, especially since our June 2022 Primary Election, my office has experienced pointed threats serious enough to be referred to law enforcement. As recently as June, for example, there were three threatening phone calls against me that were referred to our FBI field office for investigation.

These threats came on the heels of my office's effort to directly combat election misinformation through a new website, and shortly after a nationally publicized situation in Otero County, New Mexico where the county commission – repeating much of the election misinformation we're seeing across the country – initially refused



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to certify the Primary Election results. My office then had to seek a court order to compel them to perform their duty under the law.

Growing distrust about our election systems leads to either apathy or indignation, both of which will have detrimental effects on our entire system of government. For the election officials and volunteer poll workers that our elections depend on, I fear that threats, coupled with the general vitriol online and in the media directed at all aspects of our elections, will cause them so much stress and uncertainty that they will simply not want to do the work anymore. We have already seen this happening in many parts of the country. For voters, I fear that the flood of misinformation will compel them to lose more and more trust in the system and they will no longer participate in our democracy.

I believe both federal and state law enforcement agencies are taking these threats seriously and are diligently investigating them. We must show the public that threats against election officials will not be tolerated.

However, legal action is the last line of defense. We will not put a stop to such threats until the rhetoric gets ratcheted down and elected officials, the media, political parties, and others find better ways to educate the public about the realities of how our elections are conducted and secured.

Furthermore, the federal government can help states and their election workers by providing resources to be used in the protection of election offices and personnel –



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for example, personal information protection like the kind my office has deployed in recent months, and upgrades to the physical safety of polling places and election offices.

I hope my testimony today is helpful for the Committee and your future work. I thank you again for giving me this opportunity to testify on these crucial matters on behalf of New Mexico and our state's election administrators.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have for me.