



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Field Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Preparing for 2020: How Illinois is Securing Elections

October 15, 2019

Gurnee Village Hall, 325 N. O'Plaine Road, Gurnee, Illinois

I would like to thank the Committee's Vice Chair, Ms. Underwood, for inviting Committee Members to Illinois to hear State and local perspectives on election security. Since she arrived in Congress in January, the Vice Chair has demonstrated a strong commitment to raising the bar on Federal efforts to improve election security at the State and local level. Too often, well-intentioned officials in Washington do not have a complete understanding of how the Federal government can best assist State and local officials in their mission. But Ms. Underwood has fought to make sure the boots on the ground have the resources they need and a seat at the table, which is why we are having this field hearing today. The Vice Chair has been a valued leader on the Homeland Security Committee, and on election security in particular, and I want to thank her for her continued efforts to hold the folks in Washington accountable on behalf of her constituents.

Election security requires a whole-of-government, Federal, State, and local, effort to protect America's elections. It is a national security issue that transcends party politics and reaches to the heart of our democracy. As we approach the 2020 election, it is critical that we work together to protect democracy's most sacred tradition: free and fair elections. Last Congress, I co-chaired the Congressional Task Force on Election Security, and met with election security experts, State election officials, and national security experts to assess vulnerabilities in election infrastructure and determine how to address them. The Task Force published a report in February 2018 that included ten recommendations and introduced legislation to implement them. That legislation, the Election Security Act, was included in H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which passed the House in March of this year. Unfortunately, the Senate has yet to act on that or any other meaningful election security legislation.

Nevertheless, since 2016, progress has been made toward more secure elections at the State and local level. The Department of Homeland Security and Election Assistance Commission (EAC) have built stronger, more effective partnerships with State and local election officials. And States like Illinois are at the forefront of that effort and have led the way. From improvements to the Illinois Century Network to the Cyber Navigator Program, the State has made smart investments in election security capabilities that make it harder for adversaries to meddle in the 2020 election. But continued election security efforts cost money, and I imagine that State and local election officials here struggle with the same budget demands as their counterparts in my District in Mississippi. That is why I am glad to be here today to learn from all of you what you need from us to help you continue the important work you do to secure elections. The Federal government – especially Congress – must understand the resource constraints of local election officials and partner with them to address vulnerabilities to election infrastructure through grants and services.

Local election officials are on the frontlines of securing our elections, and your success depends on the resources and support you receive from Federal and State governments. The intelligence community has made clear the threats to our elections persist. Acting Director of National Intelligence, Joseph Maguire, told Congress that we should expect "adversaries and strategic competitors to refine their capabilities and add new tactics as they learn from each other's experiences" in advance of the 2020 elections. I look forward to hearing from our panel of witnesses today about how Illinois is leading the way and securing their critical election infrastructure, and how Congress and federal agencies can support these efforts to further strengthen our elections and protect them from another attack.

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