



# Election Security and Protection: Preparing for the 2026 Elections

Maine Department of the Secretary of State



# Authority of the Secretary of State

- Article 1, Section 4 of the US Constitution clearly states that elections are run by the states – not the federal government.
- The Maine Constitution puts the Secretary of State in charge of state elections.
- Maine laws governing state and federal elections – Title 21-A – requires specific actions by the Secretary of State regarding state and federal elections.



# Training and coordination with state and local entities

- We are in touch daily with the Maine Office of the Attorney General.
- The Division of Elections provides regular, annual trainings for municipal clerks, as well as ongoing educational materials and guidance.
- We hold regular (biweekly) meetings with municipal clerks from around the state.
- The Division of Elections provides trainings to law enforcement about election laws prior to every election including primaries.
- We provide law enforcement and local election officials with an election law pocket guide.
- We host annual “tabletop the vote” scenario planning exercises for clerks and partners.
- Ahead of each election, we convene the AG’s office, law enforcement, cyber-security experts and emergency management agencies for coordination specific to the election.



# Working with other Secretaries of State

- We are in touch daily with Secretaries of State and their staff regarding potential federal legislation and executive orders, litigation, and best practice to administer and safeguard the elections.
- We support each other in multi-state litigation.
- We share best practices, warning signs, messaging successes, and more.
- We participate in national “tabletop the vote” exercises.
- We meet biweekly with the Elections Committee of the National Association of Secretaries of State.
- Secretary Bellows serves on the Exec. Comm. of the EI-ISAC advancing cybersecurity and election security protections including a Sit Room.



# Security of election materials

- Maine has strong laws regarding ballot chain of custody requirements from printing to post-election storage.
- The Elections Division provides necessary materials for municipalities to run state and federal elections. The memory sticks used in the ballot tabulators are tested for accuracy at the Elections Division before being tested again at the municipal level, then are securely stored for use during ballot tabulation and on Election Day.
- Maine has specific provisions for secure storage of certain election materials. For example, a municipal clerk may not transfer possession, custody or control of a voting machine to any person except as expressly authorized by the Secretary of State. And the Secretary of State must provide tamper-proof ballot security containers that are equipped with a suitable method of securing the ballots against tampering, which must be used for securing used ballots and other election materials for statewide elections.
- By law, absentee ballot drop boxes must be secured to a municipal office building or to a post sunk into the ground; be designed to prevent someone from stealing or damaging ballots once they're inserted, and monitored by law enforcement, municipal staff or a surveillance camera.
- In the case of a Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) tabulation or a recount, law enforcement officers transport the ballots from municipalities to Augusta under the direction of the Secretary of State.



# Voting place and physical security

- The Department of the Secretary of State works with municipal clerks to analyze and improve physical safety features at voting places.
- The “warden” is the presiding election officer at a voting place.
- In Maine, law enforcement officers may be present at voting places, but may only go into the area where ballots are cast (behind the guardrail) at the invitation of the warden of the voting place.
- The warden is required to keep order at all times in and around the voting place. If someone creates a disturbance or otherwise violates the law at the voting place, the warden must direct that the person be removed and confined (if necessary) until polls are closed.
- On request of the warden, a law enforcement officer must remove, confine or arrest a person who creates a disturbance or otherwise violates the law at a voting place.
- The Division of Elections oversees enforcement of election laws and procedures on Election Day, maintaining close contact with clerks around the state who in turn advise and train their wardens on election laws and procedures for Election Day.



# Cybersecurity

- The Central Voter Registration system (CVR) is the technological backbone of Maine's elections. There are strict cybersecurity and privacy requirements that municipal clerks and registrars must agree to in order to access the CVR to do their work.
- The CVR and the data it contains are additionally protected by the Department of Secretary of State's robust cybersecurity and information security team.
- Tabulators and other elections equipment meet cybersecurity and accuracy standards set by the federal, nonpartisan Election Assistance Commission. Our tabulators are never connected to the internet.
- The Department's cybersecurity and information security team works closely with partners in the state's IT department and with municipal staff so that data and systems are protected at all levels.
- The Department assists municipal officials in recovering social media accounts when hackers take them over, so that local election officials can communicate effectively with their voters.



# Protections against voter intimidation

- When the Trump Department of Justice (DOJ) tried to gain access to Mainers' sensitive, personal information through a demand for Maine's voter rolls, Secretary Bellows said no. More than two dozen states have joined the bipartisan coalition that is refusing to turn over voter data. The Trump DOJ brought these cases to court, but states have been winning. We will keep fighting to keep Maine voter data in Maine.
- Maine voters have many options for voting absentee so that they can be sure they're able to cast a ballot – no matter what happens on Election Day. Maine has 30 days of absentee voting – both in-person absentee, by mail, or otherwise at home. Any Maine voter may now sign up for ongoing absentee voting so that they receive a ballot each election without having to fill out the request form over again.
- In order for voters to cast their ballots without interference, certain activities are prohibited on Election Day. For example, within a voting place, a person may not influence or intimidate a voter. On public property within 250 feet of the entrance to a voting place a person may not influence a voter's decision about who or what to vote for or display advertising material about a candidate or question on the ballot.
- Unlike some other states where mass challenges to voters' eligibility is allowed, Maine's challenge procedure requires a challenger to swear under oath (with the penalty of perjury) the reason that an individual isn't eligible to vote, along with the specific source of information or personal knowledge that the challenge is based on. A challenge to an Election Day voter can only be made when the voter is being checked in at the incoming voter list, but before the voter enters the voting booth.
- A challenged voter still casts a ballot. The merits of the challenge are decided after the election (after a recount, if the number of challenged ballots in that race would make a difference in the outcome, and the recount is contested).
- It is a federal crime to deploy armed federal agents to voting places. It is also contrary to Maine law.



# Recounts and Audits

- Maine has a strong history of conducting recounts – often several – each general election, and having those recounts validate the outcome of the Election Night count.
- Recounts are easy for candidates or campaigns to request and are free to request in very close races.
- Recounts are open to the public to attend and are livestreamed on the Department’s social media channels.
- In a recount, the two campaigns supply volunteers and attorneys to review and count each ballot in a race so that both agree on the vote count and winner of the race. Staff from the Department facilitate the recount for the campaigns.
- Maine also recently implemented post-election audits to increase confidence in the accuracy of elections and how they’re run.
- Maine’s post-election audits are designed to look at the close races that haven’t already been recounted.



# Funding

- Maine is facing two funding challenges right now with regard to elections.
- The tabulators used across the state are 14 years old. While the currently-leased tabulators still accurately count ballots, due to their age, it is important to replace them with new tabulators now before they become obsolete. We need additional funding to get a new tabulator lease with newer models (which cost more than the current ones) and additional tabulators so that towns with population growth since the last lease can obtain additional tabulators. This will alleviate the bottlenecks we've seen of voters waiting to put their voted ballots into tabulators at the voting places.
- Election administrators are excellent contingency planners – we prepare for anything. But sometimes the solution to a new challenge requires spending more money than you've anticipated. For example, paper or shipping costs may rise unexpectedly due to drastic changes in the price of gas. That's why we've asked the Legislature for "carry-over funds" up to \$750,000. These are funds which were already appropriated to Elections but have not yet been spent. We're requesting to keep those funds in our account so that we can have a cushion to weather new expenses in the upcoming fiscal year.