Hearing on Election Security Testimony
Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony this morning.

My name is Thomas Hicks. I am the Chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, better known as the EAC. The Commission was established by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and is a bipartisan, independent federal agency tasked with helping election officials and the voters they serve.

Our mission is as critical now as it has ever been, in part because it is difficult to identify an area of public service that has changed as much as election administration in the past 15 years. Against the backdrop of voters who expect more 'on demand' service, election officials have to keep pace with emerging technology, evolving election and access policies, enhanced security protections and new industry standards.

The election official of today is also expected to do more with less and have the industry knowledge of a variety of different fields in order to pull off the logistically demanding task of administering an American election. For example, election administrators have always had the challenge of working with the press as well as a public relations professional, understanding poll worker recruitment and training as well as a human resources manager, knowing mail regulations and schedules as well as the postal service, and identifying accessible and legal polling places as well as any city planner. Increasingly, however, election officials must also be information technology experts, as many election officials manage larger numbers of complex information systems, data, vendors and technical staff than any other department within their jurisdiction.

Election officials also operate under a tremendous amount of pressure. They have one chance to administer an election and ensure that it accurately reflects the will of the voters they serve. There is no margin for error. Election officials must get it right every time.

While election officials are at the heart of this work, the EAC provides considerable resources to state and local election officials looking to strengthen their ability to prevent, detect and recover from potential cyber-attacks. For as long as we have had elections, there have been threats to the election process. Election officials have long developed protections and procedures to ensure integrity in our elections.

Election security, both physical and technological, is not a new concept for election officials. Since the implementation of electronic voting systems and statewide voter registration databases more than a decade ago, election officials have focused on ways to better secure the election process.

One crucial way the EAC does this is through our Testing and Certification program that ensures voting machines are tested against the most up-to-date standards possible. The most recent

version of these standards, the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines 2.0, were adopted by the EAC's Technical Guidelines Development Committee in September 2017. The new voting system testing guidelines will be previewed at our Standards Board and Board of Advisors meetings next month and then will come before the commissioners for adoption. Once released, these guidelines will be the most comprehensive set of standards against which voting systems can be tested in the United States.

The EAC also provides IT management training focused on the mindset, knowledge base and resources needed by election officials to manage their dependent, yet disparate systems. The EAC works with individual states and jurisdictions to mold the class to each audience's specific and unique needs. The EAC has conducted these trainings in eight states in the last twelve months alone, with at least two more planned this year.

Another important part of the EAC's work is to educate the public about election security. Three weeks ago in San Antonio, we premiered a short video explaining the complex and multi-layered security measures in place to protect elections. It is our hope that understanding the steps election administrators use to secure elections will bolster voter confidence, and I would be happy to provide members of this committee with a link to the video and its accompanying presenter materials.

As a key component of the EAC's HAVA-mandated clearinghouse responsibilities, the Commission also provides a wealth of other resources to help election officials. These include best practices guidance, election preparedness checklists, election database support, guidance on contingency planning, and more. The Commission recently expanded on the secure voting system procurement help it already provides election officials and developed new cyber incident response planning tools for jurisdictions. In addition, as election officials evaluate election technology purchasing decisions, the EAC provides request-for-proposals development guidance. We also produce cybersecurity documents and plans, as well as host forums to bring cybersecurity experts together with election officials.

Increasingly as part of this work, the EAC has ensured election officials are able to draw on the expertise and intelligence of other federal agencies.

Following the Critical Infrastructure designation, the EAC acted as an intermediary to help DHS officials better understand elections and the most impactful ways to help election administrators protect U.S. elections from cybersecurity threats. The EAC also ensured that state and local officials had, and will continue to have, a voice at the table as DHS works to further develop the critical infrastructure subsector that will support election systems.

Last summer, the EAC convened an Election Infrastructure Subsector Working Group, consisting of state and local election officials, to meet with DHS Critical Infrastructure staff. That group led to the successful establishment of the Elections Government Coordinating Council, or GCC, in October 2017, and the EAC was a key driver in its successful launch. The GCC will establish information sharing protocols between election officials and DHS on issues, such as cyber and physical security, and are currently drafting a sector specific plan. The EAC's

Chairman serves on the executive committee of that group, its Vice Chair serves as an official member of the committee, and the third EAC commissioner serves as an ex-officio.

The EAC has also routinely invited members of the Department of Homeland Security to speak at roundtables, public meetings, and most recently, the EAC Summit for election officials in January of this year. Next month, representatives of DHS will also speak on panels about election security at the EAC's Standards Board and Board of Advisors meetings. These opportunities have been natural outgrowths of the relationship between the EAC and DHS.

I conclude my brief remarks today by assuring you that American elections are administered by dedicated and masterful project managers who go above and beyond their responsibilities to increase the security, accessibility, and efficiency of our systems. The EAC will continue doing all it can to provide support to election administrators as they work to ensure American elections have integrity and deliver results that reflect the will of the people.

I thank you for holding today's committee hearing to examine an issue of critical importance, and I look forward to answering the Committee's questions.