

BRENNAN CENTER --- FOR JUSTICE

Testimony of Gowri Ramachandran, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law
Oregon Legislative Assembly, Senate Committee on Rules
Feb. 28, 2021

On behalf of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law,¹ I write to provide testimony on the alarming national trend of increased threats, harassment, and intimidation of election workers.

In the spring of 2021, the Brennan Center for Justice commissioned a national survey of election officials. We also held interviews and hosted conversations, along with the Bipartisan Policy Center and the Ash Center at Harvard's Kennedy School, with nearly three dozen election officials and over thirty experts. This culminated in a [report](#) entitled "Election Officials Under Attack: How to Protect Administrators and Safeguard Democracy," which I have included with my testimony.

What we learned from the survey, the interviews, and the discussions was heartbreaking. We found that roughly one in three election officials feel unsafe because of their job. Approximately one in six listed threats to their lives as a job-related concern. We also found that local election officials feel unsafe because they were, and in many cases still are, being harassed and threatened in the wake of the 2020 election. They told us that the quantity and severity of these attacks has dramatically increased as compared to past election cycles.

Several of the election workers we interviewed reported that their family members, including elderly parents and children, were harassed using crude language or threatened with violence. The voicemail of one elderly parent of an election official was filled to capacity with harassing and frightening messages. Multiple election officials told us that the [persistent](#) harassment forced them and their families to flee their homes and seek mental health treatment for their children. And when they reached out to law enforcement for help, the response was often insufficient to ensure the official, their staff, or other election workers felt safe.

For instance, one official was advised by the police to outfit her home with additional security features, such as a doorbell camera. But she did not have any money in her budget to pay for these services. Some described how they received advice about how to minimize the amount of one's personal information online, such as a home address or cell phone number, but they had no

¹ The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law is a nonpartisan public policy and law institute that works to reform, revitalize, and defend our country's system of democracy and justice. I am a senior counsel in the Brennan Center's Democracy Program. My testimony does not purport to convey the views, if any, of the New York University School of Law.

time or staff to place multiple phone calls and requests to the data brokers who put this information online.

Nor did they have the resources to look into whether they were entitled to address obscuring in public databases, a service many states provide to victims of domestic violence. Many election officials said that such laws should be applicable to them and their staff. H.B. 4144 would ensure that election workers can take advantage of address confidentiality in Oregon.

In the months since we published our report, journalists at Reuters have [documented](#) violent threats and harassment against election officials across the country, even identifying nine of the harassers, none of whom had been held accountable, and few of whom showed any remorse for their actions. The U.S. Department of Justice has announced a task force to combat the problem and has brought charges against two individuals thus far.

It is important to supplement after-the-fact criminal accountability with steps that can help election workers feel safe and secure now, as they prepare to administer primary and general elections in 2022. H.B. 4144 does just that, as it allows election workers to keep their address confidential by virtue of their status as election workers, without waiting for bad actors to engage in threats, harassment, or other disturbing behavior.

Threats against election workers for doing their job are threats against democracy itself, and H.B. 4144 is a helpful step in promoting a safe and secure democracy.