

House Oversight and Reform Committee
Hearing on North Carolina State Board of Elections
Auditorium. June 22, 2023. 1:30–3:30pm

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Welcome to this week’s episode of House Oversight Committee, I am your host Jake Johnson, alongside Harry Warren as our co-chair.

First off, I would like to thank our Sergeants at Arms for being here and keeping us safe. Jonas Cherry, if you could raise your hand.

Jonas Cherry: Yes, sir.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: There it is. Jonas Cherry, Todd Jordan, Thomas Terry, and Stafford Young. Thank you all for being here. I don’t believe we have any pages here.

I’m going to read a brief opening statement and then I will swear in Ms. Brinson Bell and then we will proceed on. And once I give my opening statement, if members would let me know if they would like to be added to the queue, that would be great. Thank you.

We hold elections every year in North Carolina. In odd number years, we often vote for municipal governments and even number years for representation at every other level of government. We vote on taxes, judges, bonds, and amendments to the state constitution. Whatever the result, it is essential that North Carolinians trust that the contest concluded without interference, tampering, or wrongdoing. It is not surprising, given the questions related to casting and counting ballots over the past few years, that North Carolinians of all political stripes have asked questions about the state’s voting laws, policies, and procedures. It is interesting that the same process can lead some to worry that legitimate votes are being denied and others to worry that illegitimate votes are being counted.

We’re fortunate to have Karen Brinson Bell, with us this afternoon to testify. Ms. Brinson Bell is the Executive Director of the State Board of Elections and has served in that role since 2019.

The State Board of Elections has an essential role together with county boards of elections in guaranteeing that eligible voters are able to vote once and to have his or her single vote counted accurately. Now that the state Supreme Court recognizes the voter ID constitutional amendment is constitutional, that the State Board is responsible for implementing voter ID rules, starting with this year’s elections in addition to the standard responsibility of ensuring fair rules are in place following fairly across the state.

Our goal in this committee is to gain understanding about the election process and restore faith in its integrity. Our hope is that with what we learn here today, we will alleviate concerns of past elections and assure the public that we trust what happens when they cast their ballots next election. If people can’t trust the election process, how can they trust anything else in government?

We're here today to learn more about that process, including how ballots are cast, how ballots are counted, how observers watch the process, how citizens register to vote, how voter lists are maintained, and how voter ID will improve election integrity, as well as how much it all costs.

Before we get started, I'd like to swear in Ms. Bell. If you could stand and raise your right hand, please.

Do you affirm that your testimony is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Thank you. You may have a seat. Thank you.

At this time, any members wishing to ask questions or make comment, please raise your hand, and we'll go ahead and get you in the queue.

Representative Dahle. Representative McNeely. Representative Warren. Representative Chesser. Representative Torbett. Willingham. Representative Cervania. Representative Quick. We're going to go ahead and say the whole committee. You can put them in any order you need there. Perfect.

I'll go over a brief description of how we plan to do questions. Once recognized, each member will have five minutes for a series of questions at which point, Ms. Brinson Bell, you are welcome to respond to those at that time. At the end of five minutes, we will make the member aware. Once we have a chance to get through all members, if time allows, we will entertain a three-minute follow up from each member to touch on any points you may have missed in the first round.

If at any point you feel like your time has been infringed on, please make the chair aware and we will retain that time onto your five minutes. With that, starting with Co-Chair Warren, I will let you take the first line of questioning.

Rep. Warren: Thank you.

Well, first of all, thank you for being here. Appreciate that.

For the benefit of those who don't really... That might be listening in and maybe some of us here, just for education, could you tell me what is the process for same-day registration? And what does a person have to provide to identify themselves? Can you tell me what information is taken and what is validated at that time?

Ms. Brinson Bell: If I may, before I answer that?

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Yes.

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Ms. Brinson Bell: I've been asked to do a presentation that touches on that and many other things.

Rep. Warren: Great. That would be fantastic.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Yes, that's my oversight. Yes. You can go ahead and proceed with that, and we'll follow up with questions after. Thank you.

Ms. Brinson Bell: And this will be more than five minutes. My apologies.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: You are recognized for 15 to 20 minutes if that works.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Thank you.

This is the list that we received [slide 2] and I believe we could probably do a semester class in a college format on some of this information, but I will try to give an overview that will be helpful for the committee to understand processes such as same-day registration, the voter record maintenance that you asked about, how we deal with voter records online, and there were some other questions pertaining to same-day registration that we'll touch on as well as how we're in the process of implementing voter ID. I'll touch on observers. I will touch on some of the policies and practices that we've put in place to improve voter confidence, and then we received a request after the letter for me to touch on some budget requests and needs.

Is there an echo or...

Rep. Johnson, Chair: No. You're okay. We can hear you clear up here.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Okay. I'm getting a nod here.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Oh, it's always an echo. Is this better if I turn the mic slightly? Can you still hear me?

Rep. Johnson, Chair: That's good.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Okay.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Brinson Bell: All right.

So, this will address the very first question: same-day registration in North Carolina [slide 3]. It was enacted in 2007, and the process permits an individual to appear at a one-stop early voting site, and when they do they provide documentation of their residence, they register at that site, and then they are

eligible to vote. This actually includes an additional step beyond what other voters are doing. When they register to vote, they complete a voter registration application and we go through other steps. A voter would not necessarily have to present documentation of their residence like a same-day registrant does during the early voting period.

So, they present that to the election official, because it is one-stop early voting, just like any early voter, they complete a ballot that does have a code, a written number that's assigned so that that ballot is retrievable, and then the information is sent back over to the county board of elections who initiates the mail verification process that all registrants go through.

This same-day, registration was repealed in law in 2013, however, the US Court of Appeals struck it down in 2016 and so we re-implemented same-day registration. My predecessor wrote a numbered memo to that effect, instructing all counties to proceed with same-day registration.

What you'll find is that out of... Currently, we have a little over seven million registered voters. The number of people who participate in same-day registration or who have registered in that manner in midterm years, it's a little less than 50,000, so 35- to 45,000 and then presidential years when our turnout is much greater, we have about a hundred to 120,000 statewide who choose to same-day register.

I'll touch on again just the steps that happen. When someone does come, they provide proof of residence [slide 4]. That can be accomplished through their North Carolina driver's license or some sort of photo ID that does have their address on it with a government agency. If it does not have a current address on it, then they would be asked for a current utility bill or government document—vehicle registration, for example—that would have their current address. And then we also have a provision that allows for college or university students to show documentation that matches their campus housing address. Obviously, that's not typically on a driver's license, for example.

The poll worker or the election official does walk the voter through the process, so this is at the help desk basically [slide 5]. They get a notice of what is required to be able to be eligible to same-day register. They fill out the registration application. We can do this in a computer manner to where the poll worker prompts them for the information, and then it's printed, and they review it. The poll worker gets their proof of residency in that process, and the voter does sign an attestation indicating that they are eligible under penalty of perjury.

This pie chart or series of pie charts [slide 6] gives you a sense of where we are with same-day registration. Mail verification, that was something I was asked to speak to, and you can see that the vast majority of same-day registrants do complete the mail verification. It's only about 1 to 2% that are not mail verified

in the time period or returned to where they are not properly registered. So, the vast majority are eligible, qualified registered voters when they cast their ballot and the verification process does prove that.

One of the other items was voter list maintenance [slide 7]. Voter list maintenance is a federal process, state-required process, that is both uniform and non-discriminatory by law. We remove voters and process voters by law for certain reasons. They may be removed for death and proper death notification from our vital records at DHHS. Felony conviction, we receive updates from the Department of Public Safety and we get quarterly reports from the federal US attorneys. And then of course we can update lists through change of address. And we get daily information exchanged through our SEIMS system, which is the State Election Information Management System. We also receive twice yearly the national change of address through the US Postal Service, things of that nature. And we have the biennial address confirmation process, which is prescribed in state and federal law for us to reach out to voters that we've lacked contact with. So, these are the reasons why we would be removing or updating our lists.

We have an extensive policy [slide 8] and this was provided to staff, so if you'd like to link to that policy, these are hyperlinks within the PowerPoint, and it's about forty pages of processes to follow the list maintenance policy for North Carolina. You will hear me stress more than once, the effort is to make sure that there are uniform processes happening from our smallest county of Tyrrell to our largest county of Wake. From Cherokee to Currituck, we want to ensure that all voters are being treated the same and that our county boards of elections are following the same processes.

In addition to the standard list maintenance policy, we do considerable efforts to keep our data in check. We have duplicate registrant queries to where we give notice to the counties if we have identified duplicate registrations. I've mentioned the biennial process, and then when we give notice for example of a new polling place, something of that nature, that would also be a point of contact.

And then we do queries to look for inconsistencies in the data: for example, if numbers are put into a name field. Right now, our system does not have the capability to prohibit that, so we look for those types of errors and try to get those things cleaned up.

The records that we maintain online are quite extensive. I will actually say I don't have anything that's been some major research study, but those who do research or my counterparts in other states often give me jabs or compliments, depending on which way they see it, for having what's considered the largest amount of publicly available data on a state elections' website. We take great pride in this. We think this increases transparency. It increases the ability for the

public to be engaged and it's our responsibility to make sure that everyone is able to have what is publicly available in their hands to do their own research.

So, we do make our election results available online both on election night when they are unofficial [slide 9]. And then, of course, once the certification takes place 10 days after the election, the official tabulation is put forward on our election results website. And then, of course, following the state board's certification.

The voter registration data is maintained. We have records dating back more than 15 years and even, in some cases, 20 years. And that's in large part because we've had an in-house system since 1998 that all counties are connected to, and it's centralized in how we are able to maintain our data.

Access to reports on absentee files. And I will note it is important that people remember that there is at no point data released, because that indicates a voter's ballot selections. How someone casts their ballot is a secret, and we maintain that secret. That is a cornerstone of elections and democracy.

Provisional files, the records are available for that as well. And we routinely update both of these for the stats and so forth that people are tracking to understand what our turnouts looking like through absentee or through provisional voting.

Polling place data [slide 10] is readily available so that voters can know where they're voting so that people, candidates can even know where they need to go to campaign. Same for the one-stop early voting sites.

Voter history data... And I'll just note, voter history is a record that's maintained indicating that someone participated in the election. We do maintain in what county they voted in, what precinct they voted, and by what voting method. Again though, there's a lot of confusion at times. Voter history does not tell us how someone votes and we do not have a way, nor should we have a way, to connect someone's voter history to their actual selections on a ballot.

And then the voter turnout data, that is exactly what it is. How many people turned out during the elections and demographic information that connects to that.

We have other tools that we provide online, [slide 11] and these allow for folks to find out about their county boards of elections, to locate their polling place. There's even images of the polling place and that helps us to be compliant with the ADA. Similarly, with one-stop early voting sites, the petition search. We don't have a lot of petitions, but we do for what petitions we have, people are able to search that. Provisional search: this is specific to the voter. If they've been issued a provisional ballot and cast that, then they get an information

sheet so that they can know if their vote was counted or not. Voter registration statistics as I've mentioned. And then a voter search. This is one of the probably most critical things is for the voter to be able to find, "Are they properly registered? Where do they go vote?" And often some are trying to figure out how they're affiliated because they don't know whether they've updated that or not.

And then in terms of voter ID implementation (again, trying to just give y'all a high level overview and we can get into details) but we have an extensive amount of work that's going into voter ID implementation. [slide 12] I think y'all are all aware the decision came down on April the 28th, and it is in effect immediately. For us, that means August the 11th. We have municipal elections that start in September, particular to Charlotte and Sanford, and then we will have additional elections in October and November depending on the makeup of those municipalities. And so the first absentee ballot that will go out associated with those elections is August the 11th. So, it is imperative that we look across the spectrum of things that we do and are readily prepared. Our project plan for voter ID implementation broadly lists 263 tasks that we need to complete pretty much before August 11th. That doesn't include anything else that we may come to an agreement on in terms of voter outreach or something of that nature.

So, just a high level of what some of those tasks include. We have and continue to update our website, social media, press releases, trying to make sure people are as informed as we can. We have no advertising budget, we have no outreach budget for this, so we're just working with what we can at this point in time. We are going through rule making. The State Board put forward proposed rules. We actually end public comment tomorrow on those rules and then the Board's going to consider them next week and they would then go to the Rules Review Commission. They are, at this point, temporary rules because of the timeframe. Y'all are probably familiar, the rules for re-commission, if we were seeking permanent rules, would be a much longer process and would extend us beyond the municipal elections.

We are updating our materials that'll go to voters... Any kind of mailings that we do to voters and the polling place materials that are needed. Training materials for our poll workers... This will be a new process for many of them since we actually have not done any kind of voter ID in a polling place since 2016, and for what we were preparing to do, they hadn't necessarily gone through training. So, this will be new for them.

We do have to update our absentee envelopes and those materials, and that does include something that we've not had before, and that's to include a copy... That the voter will have to include a copy of their ID with those materials. And if you're familiar with the absentee process, we look at the application on the return envelope to make sure that the criteria has been met:

proper number of witnesses, the signature, and so forth. We don't... Until that's approved by the board, we don't actually remove the ballot and put that into the tabulator. So, we have to consider also what do we do with that copy of the ID because that's now one of the criteria, but it also contains PII, personal identifiable information. So, we're going through that process too to create an entire packet that will secure the person's information as it travels through the mail, while also making it accessible to the board members at the county level to review before making the decision to open the ballot or not.

That's a lot for one bullet point, but that's how extensive things like this are.

The next is actually really an interesting situation that we ran into. We are required to have the ability to make an ID for someone at the county board of elections. So, we purchased the equipment back in 2019. That means that this equipment and its software are five-ish years old. And in technology terms, that's antiquated. We are actually in the process of trying to get that updated, make sure that we have working equipment, and make that available to the counties because that was not a county mandated purchase, that was a state mandated purchase. And it also has to still be compatible with our SEIMS system in order to maintain those records and to store those photos that are taken because... And we have to do that in a more secure manner because a photo is also PII. So those are some of the considerations there.

And then last, but certainly not least, on this broad list is that we are working with the colleges, universities, community colleges, both public and private, and with public government employees for acceptable IDs there. So that outreach has been done. We are in the process of receiving those, and we'll go through an approval process as those are received.

All right, so all of that we're doing without any funding. We've asked for funding, and we hope that y'all will get behind that because that would allow us to do things that were done in 2016, the lead up to 2016, but we don't have funding for now [slide 13]. Things like instructional videos. There was an advertising fund back then, so we would like to see that put back in place. That would allow for billboards, print advertising. We would like to be able to do mailings, both targeted and households. The targeted would be for those who we can do matching with DMV data to determine who might not have an ID and mail directly to them. And then of course household mailings, they're... It's a household mailing.

And then additional ID machines, right now the counties have one, and so if it breaks, goes down, we'd like to have a backup method or ability for them to use those at events or something like that.

And then we would like to continue... Or have community outreach events. We've gone out into the field in the past. We'd like to be able to do that. Our

counties do not necessarily have the staff to be able to do all of those outreach events, so that's a way we could support the counties.

And then we actually do not have a graphic designer on staff, so we'd like to be able to contract one of those to just help create some of these materials.

Party observers, these are the individuals who are appointed by political parties [slide 14]. They are different than poll workers. Poll workers take an oath, they go through training, they are there by political appointments as well, but then finally decided by the county boards of elections based on those recommendations from political parties. The observers are a list compiled by the political parties, and they're there on behalf of the political parties. Their training, if they receive it, is done by the parties, not by the county boards of elections. But I don't want to dismiss their importance. They do have an important role to our process, and I was able to be a part of a workshop some time ago that really looked at what North Carolina has in place and gave considerable recognition to a very thorough process and well-established terms of what an observer can and can't do without having interference in the process.

And so that would be my next slide [slide 15] is just to highlight a little bit of what our laws do allow, and the administrative code at this point in time.

Observers, they come into the polling place. They are designated as such, but that means they can't electioneer while they're in the polling place. Anytime someone crosses the buffer zone, and come into the voting area, they cannot be campaigning. They are there to observe and as such, they take notes as they need to. They cannot video or photograph because there's restrictions on that in general, not just for observers. They also need to be able to hear and observe, but they have to be maintained at a distance to protect the PII of the voters, and also their ability to cast a secret ballot. We've worked on making sure that that's very clear to everyone and it is applied consistently in all counties and to all observers, no matter their political party affiliation.

And then... I'm almost done. I think we're at the bottom of the bullet point list.

So, there was a question around trust in elections [slide 16]. And this is something that in my 17 years of working in elections, it's something that I think we hold vital to the profession that we're in. We want to demonstrate to the voters all the processes and procedures that are in place. And really one of the best things that people can do is to be a precinct official so that they can see that in action and be a part of that. But because of the need for a new election [in 2018] in CD-9 [Ninth Congressional District], which was in part my first large scale election as state director. We had that, and then we had been designated critical infrastructure and that meant that there was a lot of questions swirling. And, so, it was actually in 2019 that we launched our voter confidence campaign

with the hashtag: “YourVoteCountsNC.” And we did this in partnership with state emergency management, with the Department of Homeland Security, with the counties. We made a concerted effort so that they could begin telling their story.

And what we firmly believe is that the best way for voters to have confidence is for them to understand how the process works. And so we have had a very robust effort in our social media to put out the facts and how elections work. We have also tried to have a very robust website. It’s considered also one of the most in depth and comprehensive in the country, and we revamped that with our state DIT back in 2020. It also added security elements that the previous website had not had.

We continue to have the means to send out the judicial voter guide where we highlight some of these security measures. I am of the David Letterman generation, so we do a lot of top 10 lists. And so we do have a top 10 facts on election security.

And then this is carried over. Many of our counties are doing special efforts. Forsyth County has what they call an election academy, and this is for members of the public to come in and learn what it is to be a precinct official. This is separate from their precinct training. This is learning about that. Brunswick County, for example, has had expos recently trying to help the public come in, see the voting equipment, become familiar with it. Stanley County’s had efforts. I could go on and on bragging about our counties.

Our Democracy Heroes campaign was critical to 2020 because we had a lack of individuals able to serve. As you can well remember, the most vulnerable population, 65 and older, are also our most common poll worker. So, we had to do some outreach and we won a national award from the US Election Assistance Commission for that effort.

And beyond that, what we’re also trying to do is to try to educate you. I appreciate this opportunity today. I talk with legislators whenever I can and with other elected officials because you are regarded, and when you can look at a voter and say, “I know I was fairly elected.” And how that process works, then that’s a testament to the work that we do. We also want to make sure that everyone, elected officials and members of the public, are aware of our public meetings, of our logic and accuracy testing that happens before each and every election.

The sample hand-to-eye count that occurs after each election and then how the county canvas process works and all of that are publicly noticed and available. And then it’s just making sure that we don’t amplify misinformation, and I think we all have a responsibility to that and trying to make sure that they know that

the trusted sources of information are those—the State Board of Elections and the county boards of elections.

Budget, and then we're done, I promise, Chairman. And then so when we've put our budget request forward [slide 17], we have added a request for voter ID, but at the time that we were asked to submit, that was not in our budget because we were still in an injunction phase. We have asked for \$6.5 million over the two fiscal years. So, consider that we don't need to just educate people for municipal elections. Not everyone's able to vote in municipal elections. We need to make sure folks are prepared when they go to vote in the presidential primary and presidential general election. We have made a request that is actually very frugal for \$13.6 million for the update of our State Election Information Management System and the campaign finance software. This SEIMS is used by every single county, over 800 users, and is the central source of how we do everything that we do.

It's how we process voter registrations, it's how we do petition checking, it's how we provide election night results. It's how you would even file for your candidacy. That is, it is a comprehensive system. It makes sure that the counties can communicate, transfer records. It's very robust. However, we built that out in-house starting in 1998. We have never revamped this system. We have updated as we can, but it is still on an old coding platform. People who are in computer science classes right now are not learning our coding platform. We're going to run out of people who can even have the skillset to keep it going. It needs additional security measures. It needs to be modernized so that it can help us have better data input. You've probably heard about me saying this in the papers and stuff, but it looks like Atari.

It does not look like what you're accustomed to with your smartphone. And matter of fact, when you think about 1998, smartphones didn't even exist. So we've come a long way in our world of technology but not with our SEIMS system, and we just desperately need you to update that and give us the means to do that. We have a project plan. We have sat down with DIT, they know what we're intending to do. We're ready to go. We're ready to contract the teams that we need who can do the work and train the folks that we do have on staff who maintain our existing system and who will carry forward any new system.

I will say that one of our neighboring states, it's my understanding, that they asked for \$40 million. It did not include campaign finance. Eighteen million [dollars] just to build their system and \$22 million to maintain it over 10 years is my understanding. I don't need \$22 million to maintain it over 10 years. So that's why I say this is a very frugal request. In terms of the campaign finance software, what we have right now amounts to—in a very non-techy way—a PDF filler-outer and a form filler-outer. We are set to go with a design that would be more like TurboTax that can be friendly to the treasurers, friendly to you who serve as your own treasurers, and just be able to input, not have to know the

laws. I mean you need to abide by them, but it will guide you through how you're supposed to report.

And we would do this over a five-year period. We've asked for it to be put into a capital improvement fund or reserve—IT reserve, however you want to term it—where we could do drawdowns as we complete portions of the project. Obviously, we have a long runway on it because we're not going to roll out new systems in the midst of an election.

Recurring services. We have been finding money as best we can to keep the absentee ballot portal going. This is the request portal but also how we are able to transmit ballots to military and overseas citizens and the visually impaired. This was put into law and was court-ordered, and we need the money. Three hundred fifty thousand [dollars] in our budget is a big chunk when we're about an \$8 million agency. There are much larger funded agencies. Fifty thousand [dollars] was part of the process we also put into place in 2020, by law, for voters to be able to track their ballot through the mail system when it goes out from the board of elections, comes back to the board of elections, that sort of thing.

That service, we contract that out through a vendor, it's about \$50,000 a year. And then as we have tried to move forward on security measures to be ready for a modernization effort, it is meant that we moved from physical servers to cloud-based. We are in the government cloud, so there's additional security measures, but it costs money to host that for the counties. All of this, I will say, when we're talking about any of these things, these are services that we provide to the counties. The counties do not contribute financially to these things, so they're getting a lot of bang for their buck, or you are when you fund it.

And then we do have to have personnel to maintain these things. We do ask to move back to eight regional support, field support. I don't know if you're aware, but I'm happy to make you aware that—I'm not happy unfortunately—that we have seen a significant turnover in our county directors, many of them in counties that you represent. I started in June 2019, but I did get the numbers all the way back to January. So since 2019 we have had 49 changes in county directors. And since we completed the 2020 presidential election, 30 of those.

So, that means you—we—have 30 counties, one-third, have a director who has never led their team through a presidential election. They may have county elections experience but never as a director. And I will say as we have tried to fill these positions or help the counties fill these positions, a lot of them don't have elections experience. When I find out someone's been a poll worker and has an extra in elections, I'm like, "Do you want to be a director?" I will candidly say. We're needing to find people willing to work and they know that it's a big sacrifice in long hours, and my hat goes off to them. I remember what it was like. I'm the fourth state elections director and I'm the only one who has ever

been a county elections director. I'm also the only one who's ever been a precinct chief judge.

But that's why we need these field support folks. We've got to be able to go in, work hand in hand with the counties, and make sure that they are up to speed. One week of new director training does not prepare someone to be an elections director. We have in legislation authorization to have a CISO [Chief Information Security Officer], we just didn't have adequate funding. So, we're asking for that. The House budget does have that included. And so to that, I say thank you. We are asking for database support. All of these records that I talk about, all of the backbone is a database. Right now, we have one database administrator at the State Board of Elections. One. So, what happens when he goes on vacation or has something unfortunate happen? So, we do need more database support.

We do not have a person dedicated to in-person voting. So, we have spread the work as best we can, but that means that our other voting specialists—absentee, candidacy, and canvass voter registration—they are taking on additional work. We need the software developers. Right now, we've got two time-limited positions that we would like to see fully funded, and then we do need additional support. When I mention IT infrastructure, this is not the folks who are just supporting the agency. They support all 100 counties, the firewalls, the networking that's required, the password management for all 100 counties. And then we would like to have a web manager. Again, it's hard to keep that website as robust as it is without someone who can help manage it.

I know I'm getting the sense that you may want me to move on a little more quickly, but are we good?

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Yeah.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Okay. So this [slide 18] just gives you a sense particular to our IT because I know we're asking for a lot of IT staffing. It is a unique situation at the State Board. We're not talking about just people who hook up printers. This is maintaining that whole system. It's making sure that we are in a good posture for cyber—if we're under cybersecurity attack—trying to prevent those. And all of the database work that I mentioned. If you think about databases (I don't know how familiar you are with them) but databases represent records upon records. If you know that we have seven-plus million registered voters right now, then we've got seven million records. But that's not all. I mentioned we maintain years' worth of data. So, it's all the people who have been removed, all the people who are deceased, all those records, all the times someone's filed for office, all the times that someone's filed a campaign finance report, these are the kind of databases we're maintaining. So, it's far beyond seven million. It's many millions of records and it takes dedicated folks. This is not something that just gets supported from DIT along with other agencies. This is a day-in, day-out, 24/7 operation. And so, you can see we have had a considerable loss.

Some of it's people who have retired from state government as they rightfully should. But attracting those people, I think y'all are hearing this from a lot of agencies, is becoming difficult. We were able to use the federal funds to up the number of individuals. We were hopeful that those would get appropriated, and when they didn't and we didn't get additional federal funds for this purpose, we've had to lay some people off. So, you can see we ramped up in 2020 in part to support our plans for modernization, in part to support some of those new technology tools that were put into place, and now we are struggling to keep our staffing where it needs to be.

And then I mentioned the funding for voter ID [slide 19]. We did receive a \$5 million appropriation for a mobile program, and that was in 2021-22 fiscal year. That had a cutoff to it. We also had the injunction. And so, what we did, anticipating that we're not sure when the court decision would come down, we asked for a carry-forward. We are now back at that same point, and we need to do a carry-forward. We've put in some carry-forward because we can do some of the photo ID equipment purchases through that, but otherwise, there's not a lot that's specific to a mobile program.

So, we don't feel like we would be good stewards of the money if we were adhering to what was put into law if we spend it on other reasons. But I would say to you that means there's \$5 million sitting there that we've carried forward that we'd love to see authorized a little more broadly. And then we'd like to have a little bit of additional funds so that we can do some of those advertising programs and things of that nature. And then I think I've hit on the SEIMS modernization at this point [slide 20]. I jumped ahead of my slides so I will not go over this one. I think I've hit on everything there.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Perfect. There you go. Absolutely. Well, thank you, Madam Director, for your presentation and your professionalism here. And as we move into questions and comments, I know this is a very passionate issue for many people, so I ask that we show our guests and our colleagues the respect they deserve. I did want to make one note that we've received written testimony from a range of organizations, Carolyn Smith of Democracy North Carolina, Dr. Andy Jackson of the John Locke Foundation, Marian Lewin of the League of Women Voters, and Christian Adams of the Public Interest Legal Foundation have submitted written testimony online, and members should have had a chance to look over those as well as the presentation from Director Brinson Bell. And again, those are all available to the public on our website. But we will go ahead and pivot now to questions. Co-chair Warren, you are recognized.

Rep. Warren: I guess the first question I have for you is, is all that going to be on the midterm? I tried to take a lot of notes because I had a lot of questions and we do have a limited time for each of us, but so I was trying to cross off what you already answered for me, and I thank you for that. One question I do have is regarding

same-day registration, how will the process you've covered with us be impacted by the voter ID implementation?

Ms. Brinson Bell: It's actually a very simple thing. Any voter who presents themselves to vote will be asked to show photo ID. And same-day registration doesn't apply to absentee, but that's a provision within our law as well that an absentee voter will provide a copy of their ID. The law does allow for us to have exemptions for reasonable impediment, religious reasons, that sort of thing. But as I mentioned, when someone does come to same-day register, they are asked to present an ID or document that identifies their current residence address. So that process takes place in addition to asking them for a photo ID.

Rep. Warren: Thank you. Can you tell me what leads to the classification of a ballot as being fully accepted, provisional, or fully rejected?

Ms. Brinson Bell: I will try to answer that. I think there are a few terms that go into different categories, but I'll start with a provisional because we get this question a lot: "What is a provisional ballot?" When someone appears to vote and we are unable to locate them in the registration books, then they are offered a provisional ballot. So, that ballot does not go into the tabulator with the other ballots. It is sealed into the envelope that identifies why they are casting a provisional ballot. It also serves as a voter registration form because if they aren't in the books, then they aren't properly registered. And so those are brought back to the county boards of elections. And during the canvass period, the staff does research to determine why this person may not have appeared on the books. It could be because they went to the wrong precinct.

And so that's going to go before the board and likely be able to count. Might only be able to count certain contests depending on ballot style or something. But it may be that they also appear at... They believe that they registered to vote when they got their driver's license. And so we do research with the DMV to determine, "Did they make an attempt, did they not?" And we present that to the board for determination. But it also, I will say, sometimes as someone who might be traveling through our state forgot to vote in their state, and we don't turn them away, but we can't count that ballot. So that's what a provisional ballot is. It's an opportunity for the voter to cast a ballot, but it's not tabulated until we consider whether it's an eligible ballot or not. What were the other two terms you wanted me to describe, sir?

Rep. Warren: Fully accepted or fully rejected ballot.

Ms. Brinson Bell: I believe those get into the absentee situations. So those terminologies are when we receive an absentee ballot, the county staff researches that and then puts it before the board. County boards review all absentee-by-mail ballots and verify that the signatures are there of the voter, the witness signatures are there attesting to the voter. And then upon confirming that, then that's fully

accepted and they can approve that ballot to be opened and put into the tabulator. Rejected means that the criteria was not met and there may be a circumstance where it could be cured or they may not be eligible, it may not be curable. So that could be rejected.

Rep. Warren: Thank you. In the written testimony that Dr. Andy Jackson sent, that my co-chair alluded to, he said that the state board showed 1,760 unverified voters that had cast ballots in 2020. Do you know whether those voters were ever registered or whether their ballots were eventually counted?

Ms. Brinson Bell: So unverified means that... There's actually a couple of different statuses, but I believe what he is making reference to is that there are times when a voter will come and register during the early voting period and same-day register, they have presented documentation of their current address, they have registered, and their ballot has been put into the tabulator with a retrievable ballot number. At that point, the registration form goes back to the county boards of elections and they initiate the verification process that occurs for any voter registration form, whether same-day registrant or not. And that is that we send two verification mailings—well, two if the first one's returned. And so, we mail out a postcard indicating not only we've gotten your voter registration form, but here's the precinct, here's the congressional district, and so forth that you reside in, and then the mail is delivered.

Sometimes that doesn't occur; it comes back. We send a second postcard or mailing verifying their address. And so, there's a very small number that he indicated. It represents about 1 to 2%. And I had a pie chart up earlier (I could bring that back up) that very few are not verified. So, 98 to 99% of our same-day registrants are verified. And I'd point out that we need to remember that it's not always the fault of the voter that they did not get verified. If it was mailed to a residential address that cannot accept mail—my father's home would be an example of that, I grew up without there being home delivery.

Rep. Warren: I'm sorry.

Ms. Brinson Bell: I'm sorry you're out of time.

Rep. Warren: I'm out of time. But I do have one quick question. Are the two mailings you refer to, are those federally required or is that our system?

Ms. Brinson Bell: It's state and federal requirement.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Yes. And if you're in the middle of a question, we'll allow the presenter to follow up with that. Next on the list, Representative Dahle, you are recognized.

Rep. Dahle: Good afternoon. So, my question is going to be about... In Senate Bill 747, you are no longer allowed to take private funding, if it passes. And I'm wondering

how that will affect places like churches that offer their in-kind community centers. Because I know various agencies will open up their doors because they have a large space, and they give it over to you and don't charge you any rent. Have you thought through how that might affect you as far as a budgetary item?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, I appreciate the question, and I think that we're all keeping up. I think that the notation of in-kind was added to the bill last night as an amendment. I would want to look at it with a little more clarity, but I would suggest to this body as they consider that bill when it comes over to them to make sure that we are clarifying what is meant by the in-kind donation. I think that was a great example. The polling places are often donated when they might charge rent otherwise. A community center, for example, might charge for someone to host a birthday party there, but they don't charge for voting to take place there. Is that the intent that the counties would not be able to accept that? If they cannot accept it because of that in-kind donation, then that's going to affect the county budgets more than the state budget.

But that obviously affects your constituents. So, I would ask you to keep that in mind. Similarly, I think it raises the question of...and I know this to be true more in the rural counties, but in Clay County, it used to be the practice that the political parties divided up providing meals to the poll workers. And so, breakfast would be provided by the Democrat Party and lunch would be provided by the Republican Party and I don't know who provided dinner, but maybe they divided that up. But that's an in-kind donation when you think about it. So, is that the intent? I would just beg that question.

Rep. Dahle: Follow up, sir?

Rep. Johnson, Chair: You're recognized for the five minutes, and again, there's no penalty for yielding back time to the chairs.

Rep. Dahle: Okay.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: No objection.

Rep. Dahle: Can you give me an example of maybe... I know people are worried about duplicates on voter rolls and that kind of thing, but it doesn't appear to me that that's a concern, but I want to know how many people approximately are taken on or put on voter rolls. I don't even know how often you get new registered. I hope a lot of new registrations for the 61 people moving into Wake County come through your office. So, is there any way to average that out or look at: How many people do you take off? How many people do you put on?

Ms. Brinson Bell: I'm not going to be able to quote that off the top of my head. We can get you exact numbers, but what I will say is that there is daily activity going on at the county level or in exchange between the state and the counties. We receive

updates from DMV daily of people registering or updating their information. As I mentioned before in my presentation, we get information on when someone's convicted of a felony or when they are no longer in a felony status. Same with when someone has passed away. We get updates from Vital Records when someone mails their registration form or when they update us of a name change. There is constant update and it's a dynamic situation and it's very hard sometimes for folks to understand why we have to do snapshots and the changes that take place. But it's a constant process.

Rep. Dahle: Thank you very much. I yield my time.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you. You got it down to 49 seconds. That was pretty good. Thank you, Representative Dahle. Representative Chesser, you are recognized for five minutes.

Rep. Chesser: Thank you Mr. Chair. And thank you Ms. Bell for coming out. As someone who dabbles in database management myself, that's insane to me. So, congratulations. Just want to talk about some of the data that's actually housed in that database, if you wouldn't mind, under the auspices of list management. What data are we actually collecting? I can go down a yes or no list if you'd like. And you can just say yes or no to particular items that are stored on there.

Ms. Brinson Bell: I will try.

Rep. Chesser: Okay. Well, are we collecting full names?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Full names?

Rep. Chesser: Yes.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes. Someone can give their middle initial instead of the actual spelled out middle name.

Rep. Chesser: And it's stored within the database?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes.

Rep. Chesser: Okay. What about NCIDs or voter ID numbers?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Those are assigned within the system.

Rep. Chesser: Okay. Full addresses?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes.

Rep. Chesser: Phone numbers?

Ms. Brinson Bell: I believe phone number is optional.

Rep. Chesser: Optional. What about driver's license IDs?

Ms. Brinson Bell: That is a form or a field on our form that either provide a driver's license or Social Security.

Rep. Chesser: Okay.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Last four.

Rep. Chesser: Okay. And so it's just the last four on a Social Security?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes.

Rep. Chesser: Okay. What about if they submit a driver's license? You guys indicate whether it's a Real ID or not?

Ms. Brinson Bell: I do believe there's a distinction, but I'd have to look at the form to confirm which way we have.

Rep. Chesser: Okay. And then you already indicated last four Social, what about the date of birth?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes.

Rep. Chesser: Passport numbers or utility bills or anything like that stored on there?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, that's not on our voter registration form. And if someone presents HAVA ID, we do indicate, because that's what some of those forms would be. We do mark that in the system that HAVA ID was provided.

Rep. Chesser: And to piggyback off of what my colleague was asking earlier about incomplete information, what happens to a voter registration or an account if it's considered an incomplete account?

Ms. Brinson Bell: So, if someone did not provide the necessary information, then we would send a mailing indicating that we do not have your driver's license or the last four of your Social, and that will be required in order to process you. Now we can put them into the system and notate that. They must provide that when they present themselves to vote or they won't be issued a ballot. So, if someone hasn't provided that, then that's when they're marked for HAVA ID required. And there's actually a big screen on our computer system, if you use the computer system, that won't let the poll worker process them until that's addressed.

- Rep. Chesser: Okay. And how many voter files roughly do you think are affected by that and currently in our voter rolls?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: I don't know off the top of my head. Most people complete the form, and then we validate them through the DMV or Social Security.
- Rep. Chesser: And is that validation or tracking of the incomplete accounts, is that the state's responsibility or the county's?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, it's one big system, so I guess we're both doing it in some way, shape, or form.
- Rep. Chesser: So, if it doesn't happen, who do we hold accountable?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, voter registration processing happens at the county level. We do audits to check what's occurring and if we see inconsistencies, then we will work with the county to get them in compliance.
- Rep. Chesser: Want to talk to you, I know we're in North Carolina, but there's a story out of Texas where about 540 voters were registered at a single address, and 170 of those voters voted. Did we have any checks and balances in place to verify addresses and duplicate addresses and see the reoccurring addresses that are coming up in the database.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: We do checks against addresses and so forth, but I would remind folks that, yeah, I don't know what the circumstances were you were referencing in Texas, but we even have some situations in North Carolina where people live on a reservation land, and they have a central address. So that can be of effect. You could have a group home where some people are living at the same address, but it doesn't mean that they're not all residents. You could even have an RV park where they have a single address. They don't even really use lot numbers because they don't deliver the mail that way. What we try to do when we have circumstances like that is to research and to see if we can determine what the circumstances are, and there's usually a very good explanation.
- Rep. Chesser: Is there a way to flag that in the system and say, "Okay, this is a commercial residence?" Like multifamily housing or single family housing within the system?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, that's part of the verification process and what one considers their... No, we don't check it as a commercial space or not, we do a verification that the mail system is willing to deliver to that address. And what someone considers their residence, especially in the world we live in today, we've got multi-use buildings and we have individuals who may be homeless but they're still a citizen of our country and eligible to register to vote and they may need to list a shelter as their residence. So, if they've attested that they are a citizen, this is

their residence, and they have validated in our system with DMV and Social Security, then we've done our checks.

Rep. Chesser: One of the things that you stated about removing someone from the rolls was a death, a notification of a death through vital records. Is that just through the state DHHS system?

Ms. Brinson Bell: It is in the sense they can also, a county can get the information from their Register of Deeds. But our law does not allow for... Those are the official records of someone's death. We often are asked, can we take someone off because of an obituary? We do not. Obituary is not an official notice of death. We can also take someone off because of a near relative signing or completing a form notifying us of their death. And so those are the mechanisms, either through Vital Records, which could include Register of Deeds records, or through the notice from the near relative.

Rep. Chesser: So, if a resident left North Carolina, say moved to Virginia, didn't register to vote there but passed away there, they could still technically be on our voter rolls because that notification wouldn't come through?

Ms. Brinson Bell: That's actually correct. Unless they notify our Vital Records and the exchange that they have, which my understanding is there is a reason outside of my world so that Vital Records cannot receive those death notices from South Carolina or Virginia, which is unfortunate. And that's why I've been a strong proponent of North Carolina becoming part of ERIC, which would be the interstate crosscheck that would allow us to get the information through the Social Security Administration of death records.

Rep. Chesser: What prevents you from getting the information from the Social Security Administration office now?

Ms. Brinson Bell: It actually is we have to be compliant with what they require for security reasons, and we're not there. And we do have Vital Records and they do get that information, but again, I'm not completely privy, but they're not able to get all the information from all 50 states and our territories.

Rep. Chesser: Okay.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Representative Chesser, your five minutes have expired but we'll be happy to come back for a second round to follow up. That's a very informative line of questioning. Representative Cervania, you are recognized for your first five minutes. Thank you.

Rep. Cervania: Thank you so much, Chair. I appreciate you coming in Director Brinson Bell. I am a database person and actually—

- Ms. Brinson Bell: Did not know this committee was so full of database people. Y'all know more than I do.
- Rep. Cervania: And also I actually have testified in front of your Board since 2015 in regards to the various aspects of elections in our state. I do want to ask several questions about non-citizen registration list maintenance, and my colleague already asked about the death maintenance. But I want to ask about, there's very much a narrative that there's thousands and thousands of records that really shouldn't be in our rolls because of various things, be it death, non-citizens, those who are felons who are now not eligible to vote. What percentage is that, really, in light of the seven million that we have in terms of registered voters in our state?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Every indication is that it is a very small number. And I wish that I could sit in front of you and say that the answer would be zero. But this is not a perfect system, I don't know how to... I mean we work each day to perfect it, but we are not a perfect system. No state election system's going to be perfect. But I think what we have to keep in mind is that we have strong laws in place that help us to do cross checks within counties to make sure that our records are up to date. We do receive notifications through DMV, through the Department of Public Safety, and Vital Records to make sure that we are maintaining our rolls. When someone completes their voter registration form, they are attesting to their citizenship, and they're convicted of a crime if found otherwise.
- And we do have processes within our law that allow for challenges to the voters if someone believes that they are not eligible to be registered in our state. And when we have investigated those situations, the numbers are in the teens, not hundreds of thousands, not thousands as were sometimes considered. So the accuracy of our rolls, considering the circumstances, it is a highly accurate system and often people associate these issues with voter fraud. And time and time again, it has been shown across my administration, my predecessors, we have a very low rate of voter fraud. Election fraud caused a new election but not voter fraud.
- Rep. Cervania: Thank you for that. And that's what I wanted to reiterate to people is that it comes in the teens, in light of the seven million voters that are eligible to vote. So, I appreciate that. You touched base on investigations. How many of those do occur annually aside from...or maybe the teens is the investigations?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: So, an investigation could be that we get indication of possible double voting, of a possible non-citizen. I also say that our investigators deal with infractions with campaign finance compliance. So, there's many things that they investigate, and we look into each one of them. Quite often it could be an error that was of no issue, or we can determine... Was it a situation where an elderly individual did not recognize that they attempted to vote more than once? But all of this, we are not the prosecuting authority. If we find a situation, we turn that over to the district attorney to determine if there's something prosecutable.

- Rep. Cervania: So, would you say, Director, that it's nominal those dispositions that are not guilty but are found to be warranted? Are they in the hundreds? Only not of campaign finance but election voter.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Related to voters, I'd say our investigators deal with a couple hundred inquiries that may not turn into cases. Ultimately, it's a very small number, again in the teens, that they would deal with. And we put out a report each year now that indicates how many investigations. So, I can provide that to the committee if they'd like.
- Rep. Cervania: And my last question, if I am allotted time, is that I worked with my county board of elections very closely in my last position, so I... Okay.
- Rep. Johnson, Chair: Feel free to follow up on that question later. You can continue.
- Rep. Cervania: Okay, I appreciate that, Chair. In your view, in light of the laws that have been passed or will potentially be passed, what's the most significant challenges we're going to be facing—or the local boards of election will be facing? And in what ways are you and us, we'll be able to assist them so that we can actually have an election process that will be smooth for all our voters?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: What I would ask this body and others to consider is, I've explained how much turnover we have. And we have to get those folks up to speed to just administer what's already on the books. The decisions by the State Supreme Court on April 28th were significant, implementing voter ID is significant, in a very short runway.
- It's not for me to decide what the laws are going to be, though I appreciate the input that we have opportunity to give, and I hope that some of those are considerations that we can make together to make it so that our counties and our state office in difficult times can administer the election effectively. But it's the sheer volume of change that we have to think about. It's enough to be implementing voter ID, but if we're going to talk about a signature verification process, that doesn't turn around overnight. If we're talking about changes to same-day registration, that's another big overhaul.
- The list is quite lengthy and we're also in a bill that starts restricting where the funds can come from, including in-kind donations for polling places. I will tell this time and time again, we need more funding for elections and more consistent funding. And that includes being able to look at our county commissioners and here at the legislature and state HR and say that the work that election officials do is not administrative only in nature and that they need to be paid more for the work that they do.
- And when you compound that with more and more and more, and we have more public records requests, and we have more threats and harassment than

we've ever faced before, it becomes an environment that... We want to succeed, and yet potentially we may be looking at situations where, at what point do we break? And I also would just point out that when you make all these changes, how can we even determine what's effective? You don't know which thing worked and which thing didn't. Why don't we implement something and see if it's effective and should we tweak that before we go and throw the entire kitchen sink at a problem?

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Director. Next on our question list, Representative Torbett, you're recognized for your initial five.

Rep. Torbett: Thank you. Ms. Bell, thank you for being here today. I think I know, and I know you know the full weight and responsibility you and your role and your department have in—I guess—in the breach between absolute public trust and sheer chaos based on the outcomes of an election.

We appreciate that. But as we all know in the last several elections, there's always those folks that look at data and determine that there's something going on. Well, what's going on that has gotten us to the level that we have not the absolute trust as perhaps past years in the outcomes of our elections. It's been all over the news, media has expanded on that. My concern is the way to do that is to how do we afford the data to the citizens out there in such a form, simplified and direct and easy to discern so they feel confident that what they're seeing in the collection of this data, they number one, understand and know that it's accurate to the best. What do you feel like you can do from your department or from your leadership to make it easy to discern and extremely accurate so citizens can go online and see what those outcomes are?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, I think that there's a lot I can say to that, and I appreciate the question. We have been working to be the most transparent state elections organization in the country. And that's no disrespect to my colleagues in other states. I hope they follow suit. We have more data publicly available than in any state for elections, and that gives the citizenry opportunity to do their own research. We welcome that. There have been some improvements we've made in our data query because of citizen input. We have also worked with some organizations that didn't have people with data backgrounds to help them understand how they can work on their data. Data is robust, people have PhDs in data. I can't make someone an expert, but we do try to make it as readily available as we possibly can and as robust as we possibly can.

The other thing I think we need to keep in mind is that we live in a world where people have more access to more, and we've continued to try to provide that. But at the same time, trying to make sure that we educate folks. And that's why we've had our voter confidence campaign #YourVoteCountsNC because we want them to know how elections work. And I think once they become a precinct official and work in those polling places, they do have a better

understanding. We encourage people to come to our public meetings and to see how our processes work. There is not much excitement to watching logic and accuracy testing happen, but once you do, you understand that our voting equipment is put to rigorous tests before every election and then audited after the fact to make sure we can verify the results of the election.

And also, I think that we're talking about something that really may have been amplified in a way that's not accurate. I know there's different polls out there, and depending on which one you look at you get a different answer. But what I look at is voter turnout. And I think earlier someone said about the trust that we have to have in our government. Trust, to me, is if you don't believe in the system, you won't use the system. And we had 75% of our voters turn out in 2020. We had 51% turn out in 2022. These numbers are high compared to other election years. So, when you look at that, our voters do have trust in how we conduct elections in North Carolina, in all 100 counties and in what the State Board is doing, I firmly believe.

Rep. Torbett: The next question along the same lines as the data is that in recent elections it's come across my desk, and some of my colleagues as well, as different people present numbers and their data, they go to your site and pull the data off, which shows the percentage of voters exceeding the percentage of registered voters. And so automatically you think something's awry here. So, what might we do to address that data to make it, number one, as accurate as possible? But across different files and file types so the people that can go online very easily, and I'll reiterate, to minimize confusion and simplify the data.

Ms. Brinson Bell: I can't change what the data represents there, but we have tried to give clear explanations. I know many of you have been copied on these requests for public records requests from citizens. Trust me, we've seen the ginormous increase in public record requests and data requests. But what we've tried to do is make our website as clear as possible about what these files represent and how to work across them. For example, there are individuals who consistently ask us, "Why does voter history and the ballot count not match?" There are reasons for that, but you can't present that in data. So, for example, when someone presents themselves to vote, they complete their poll book form and check in, but then suddenly decide... I mean we've had people stand there in front of a poll, a precinct official, and rip up their ballot, throw it in the air, and walk out the door.

They didn't cast a ballot, so now you're off, right? Because you've had voter history assigned to this person because they came in and they got a ballot. They just chose to not vote it, but that didn't go in the tabulator. So, it's two different data sets and you have to help folks get to that point. And just an acceptance of that is what sometimes we have a difficulty getting folks to understand. It's not even how to work the data, it's just understanding that it is accurate, but you've got to be able to understand what it represents.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Representative Torbett, your time is expired. Would you like one additional follow up?

Rep. Torbett: I'll reserve the balance of my time, sir.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Good. Thank you, Representative. Representative Willingham, you are recognized for your initial five minutes.

Rep. Willingham: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Bell, I'm not going to use a lot of time, but I have two questions. Before I start, I represent Edgecombe County, Martin County, and Bertie County. That's a combination of about 1,710 square miles. That's how big my district is. And in my district, voting times, especially early voting—we have five voting sites, so keep that in mind—I mean over 1,700 square miles and you got five voting sites. I can break that down even more. In Edgecombe County, we usually have three [early voting sites], and Edgecombe County itself is 507 square miles. Martin County is 462 square miles; it has one voting site. Bertie County, which is 741 square miles, and there are two early voting sites. My thing is that in the rural areas we have an issue, of course, it's transportation—where people live and getting to polling places.

And that's the challenge. So, keeping that in mind about the distance and the number of voting places we have, what do you think that we can do to be on a better par with our urban neighbors as far as having voting sites or getting more people involved in voting as a result of being in a place where they can get to a voting site? From your experience or your knowledge, what would you see as the thing that we need to do or anything that we can do? Anything that you can do? "You" meaning the Board of Elections or our local boards of election.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, you're speaking to a girl who grew up in Duplin County. I think Representative Dixon was here earlier. So, I'm from a rural county. And I was a county elections director in Transylvania, which is fairly rural. You, Representative Johnson, used to represent me.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Very aware.

Ms. Brinson Bell: And when I was a field support person for the State Board of Elections, in an earlier iteration of that position, I represented Madison, down to Polk, and all the way out to Cherokee County. So only Buncombe was considered something beyond rural, I would say. It's a resource issue. And it's a tough resource issue because what you're speaking to is early voting, which for most general elections is how 60, 65% of our voters cast their ballot. That's not partisan. When you've got that kind of number, it's not a partisan preference, it's how people prefer... The preference is that's how they prefer to vote in North Carolina because we've had such a long-standing tradition of one-stop early voting. But it takes money, it takes adequate facilities, and it takes people. You can't set up an early voting site... To have any voting site, early or election day,

requires, at minimum, five people. And then you've got to go beyond that when you're going to expect a large volume of turnout.

So, what I would say is that the county commissioners have to fund it. And if they can't because of the economic conditions they're faced with, then I'm sure they would not turn down state funds to do so. But that's what it would take in order to get the people that we need, the spaces that we need, and so forth. And that's a real challenge for our rural areas. Add to that, you mentioned transportation, the difficulty with rural communities... Where I grew up in Kenansville, that's the county seat but it's one of the smaller municipalities. People don't work there unless they work for the government or for the hospital, for the most part. So they're going outside of that. When I worked in Transylvania County, people did work in Brevard, but that was on one side of the county.

So, a lot of people went into Jackson County or to Georgia or into Asheville. I mean it's just all over. And so that's another thing that the counties have often said is that they need the flexibility to realize what their voting population needs in terms of hours. We used to have that and the county directors still talk to me about that. I won't push that message today, but I will say, whatever we want to do with early voting, we need to recognize that it is the preferred voting method for the vast majority of North Carolinians, and it takes resources.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Representative Willingham, would you like to be recognized for one more follow up?

Rep. Willingham: No, sir.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you, Representative Willingham. The Chair had a quick question and then we'll get to the final couple speakers. In the 2022 election, if I'm recalling these numbers right, I think it was 266 people received provisional ballots because their records indicated that they had already voted when they came to vote, they had voted in some other fashion. And 84 were ultimately rejected. I understand you can't reclassify a ballot as a provisional once it's already been cast, but I guess the question is how do election officials determine which one of those to count? If there was either, we'll give the benefit of the doubt, saying accidental double count or if somebody was trying to do something intentionally, how does the elections director there handle that?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, I don't have those numbers in front of me, but I'm assuming the 266 was statewide. So that's actually a pretty good number considering that we had a 51% turnout in the 2022 general election. And so, let's keep that in perspective, then we're talking about two, two and a half per county that had to be considered for that reason. And that's typically, because I don't know how many are a junior or a senior, but that, I would say, is the most common issue that we have. Someone gets checked in under their father's or their son's name and we

have to correct that. Which is why it's a good thing that we have provisional balloting, because I'd hate to turn someone away because that was not the case.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Perfect. Well thank you for that. And Representative Quick, I didn't have you on the original list. Did you seek recognition?

Rep. Quick: I did. I'd raised my hand.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Representative Quick, you are recognized for your initial five minutes.

Rep. Quick: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for your comments. I think your comments have answered a lot of my questions, but I do have just a few. You mentioned some of the changes that that've already been implemented and it seems that there will be more on the way. Are you concerned about, you mentioned the need for more funding, more consistent funding. Are you also concerned about the need for more time? Or what other areas of concern do you have?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, I appreciate the question. And again, it's about resources. It takes people, it takes money. It does take time. When we are talking about an antiquated SEIMS system and we are already having to make updates for voter ID, we scope that as a project. So, can you tell we've implemented project management and Lean Six Sigma practices at the State Board of Elections since 2019. Very proud of that. But it means that we sit down with our developers and we say, "We need this report in order to comply with this segment of the law," or, "This change goes into effect now where we have to indicate that someone's provided voter ID." Whatever it might be. And we have to say like... To me, some of those sound really simple. There's times when our developers come back and say, "Oh no, that touches six different modules, and now that's going to be an 84-day development time. And if we do that, then we can't do... You know, we've got to do this, this, and this."

And so that's what we're having to weigh something as significant as signature verification being discussed, even though that software... Software is expensive. Software requires sorting machines that they can go through. And even if you just say, "Okay, we don't buy the sorting machines, we get scanners." Well, you're scanning an envelope that has multiple envelopes or a ballot in it and the ID in it and is that application that we talked about with absentee ballots. And if someone mistakenly sends us an actual ID, now you've got that thickness. It's not going to go through a scanner like we might have at our home. We are going to have to get high commercial grade scanners and so forth.

And then we have to go back to our developers and say, "How does this communicate with SEIMS in a system that's based on a platform of coding from 1998?" So, I do worry, but we are resilient people and somehow find a way. But I ask for understanding and let's figure out how to do this well. Because if we

don't succeed as election professionals, the people it hurts the most are the voters. And we need to be certain that they are able to still have a good voting experience. We owe it to them. That's how we maintain the trust that we've been talking about, too.

So, I don't know if I answered your question.

Rep. Quick: You did, absolutely.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Thank you.

Rep. Quick: How accurate would you say that our state and county voter rolls are?

Ms. Brinson Bell: I stand by them. I mean, I have said right here in this room that they're not perfect, but I can't point you to a perfect system. What I can say is that we go to great strides to ensure their accuracy. We do not have an issue with voter fraud. We haven't had issue with the need to call for new elections other than a situation that dealt with ballot harvesting, and we worked together to come up with legislative remedies to that. And so I stand by the accuracy of our rolls. And I will also say that it's important for us to remember that there may be times when members of the public or even members of the legislature don't agree with us, but we are following the law as intended. And there are moments when we have to stop and err on the side of the voter so that we do not disenfranchise them if there's not clarity in how we're supposed to administer it.

Rep. Quick: Are we at significant risk of non-citizens being added to our voter rules?

Ms. Brinson Bell: No, sir.

Rep. Quick: Thank you. The last thing I have, it's not a question. Maybe you may find a question in it, but I think it's fine for us to question and evaluate and even investigate our elections. But I think there's something else that is needed and that is acceptance of the fact that we have good elections. And I think that acceptance starts with elected officials and with candidates.

So, I don't know that there's a question in that, but in hearing what you say and what you have testified to today, one of the things that we must have from our side and the candidate side is we have to accept the fact that we have good elections. And I appreciate you being here today.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, I appreciate it, and the comment that I'll make is that I take the fact that you were willing to take your oath and be sworn in and not protest your own elections to be testament that you believed you were freely and fairly elected and that our system works, and I will hold that we will continue to provide you that service.

- Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you. And, Representative McNeely, you're recognized as the last member with five minutes. After that, if you would like to be recognized for up to—that's important—up to an additional three minutes. Doesn't have to be; you can always yield it back. You'll be recognized at that time. Representative McNeely, you're recognized.
- Rep. McNeely: All right. I feel like this timeline was kind of like speed dating. We'll see how our relationship works out, though.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: I recognize, too, some of y'all are ready to get on the road.
- Rep. McNeely: I know. I'm going to give you just a true or false question here that was told to us, the head administrator for ERIC stated to the House Freedom Caucus about a month ago, that they believe there are between 500- and 600,000 that should not be on our voter rolls. Do you believe that? True or false?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: I have no reason to question him. I find him to be a very trustworthy election official.
- Rep. McNeely: All right. That makes things real interesting. I'm going to try to play on the lines of absentee ballot because that's the part that always gets a little fuzzy with me. How will voter ID work with absentee ballots going forward? And the reason I ask that is, will y'all keep a copy of the ID or whatever, sent to y'all to validate them on file to compare to when they may come in-person voting, or will this be every time you come, you show an ID. If it appears to be you, that's okay?
- You understand? There could be a chance where a different face shows up on absentee versus who shows up for in-person in the next election. So, will there be a track of voter ID to see that it stays consistent?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, I think the answer to your question is that the law says that anytime someone presents themselves to vote, they will present us with a photo ID. I'm not keeping track of the person who voted at their polling place two elections ago to the ID. We're not holding onto their ID. They must present at that time. And so, the absentee voter, with each absentee ballot that they submit, they will be providing a copy of ID. And if they choose the next time to vote by a different method, presenting it early voting or on election day, they'll present ID just like every voter. I mean, it's the ID of that moment for the method by which they vote.
- Rep. McNeely: We will not have a file then necessarily for absentee ballots and their ID.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: That's not prescribed within the law. And I'm not sure how maintaining that would adhere to the law.

- Rep. McNeely: Well, I worry there could be a loophole there, but maybe not. Maybe I'm just rabbit here just catching something ...
- But why can't we go ahead and start counting our absentee ballots and record the totals? Not necessarily the actual, but the totals like we do kind of with early voting, how many come in and that way, come election day, we already know how many absentee ballots have showed up at the different precincts or at the different county levels?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, we do know that information, sir. I will say—
- Rep. McNeely: Is it published though? I mean is it put out early voting is ... because I don't remember seeing it.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: We do have those files. I'll point out, there's a couple of different things we provide with absentee by mail. One, we do indicate how many people have requested a ballot be sent to them. However, we no longer (this came about cause of the CD9 situation) we no longer publish who has requested, just the numbers. And then, as we hold our absentee board meetings, because remember all county boards review the ballots. They have five absentee board meetings leading up to election day. And though at that point, the ballots... have been collected, researched by the staff and are presented to the board for their review. And at that meeting, they can approve. And so, we do publish the number of approved ballots and then they are opened and put into the tabulator. They are not tabulated until election day. And those results are released at 7:30 PM, and that tabulation happens at the final absentee board meeting of election day.
- Rep. McNeely: But there's nowhere on any county website or anything that would say, okay, we sent out 532, we have received back at this time 112 or nothing like that.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: We have two different reports. One indicates how many people have requested, and then we have a different report that indicates how many have been approved. We don't connect those ... They're numbers. We're not connecting—
- Rep. McNeely: Just raw numbers. Okay.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Right, that Allison Dahle requested one and Allison Dahle returned hers, those are two separate reports.
- Rep. McNeely: Exactly.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: And they're just numbers. Okay.
- Rep. McNeely: But that's not public though until election day.

- Ms. Brinson Bell: The request log, that's correct.
- Rep. McNeely: Okay. All right. All right. I guess my next question too is, who can challenge these absentee ballots? Can even a poll worker challenge them, or is it mainly just the county election board can challenge them? Who has the ability to challenge an absentee ballot far as validity?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Now we're having pop quiz. I'm trying to remember the challenge laws on this one. The county board is reviewing them for all the criteria having been met. If there is a challenge, there can be, I believe a challenge by the board. And then I believe it can be challenged currently ... I'm trying to remember if it's a voter of that precinct or a voter of the county.
- Rep. Quick: Precinct.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: It's the precinct. Thank you. Yeah. The change is being discussed.
- Rep. Johnson, Chair: Rep. McNeely, time has expired. Would you like to go ahead and exercise your additional three minutes now since we're about to—
- Rep. McNeely: Let me take it now.
- Rep. Johnson, Chair: Okay, we'll go ahead and give it to you now. Add three minutes back on.
- Rep. McNeely: We won't go into that no more to a point ... One question I do have: In 2020 and in 2022, you made some rule changes or attempted to, that did end up affecting some of the election laws to a point. What, or who maybe, made you think that you had the authority to do that? And it may be in your job description and if it is there, but I would like to hear from you.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, there's been a lot of discussion even last night in the Senate about a settlement agreement that was reached between the State Board of Elections and a lawsuit that was filed that would've had significant changes to election processes very close in to the election. By a unanimous decision of the State Board members, all five, two Republicans and three Democrats, they unanimously decided to settle with that lawsuit on three items. They then delegated authority to settle that matter to me as state elections director. And it was very specific. What they agreed upon is what I could settle. It did not give me any additional authority. And it simply used me as an administrative officer to sign those documents and to proceed as instructed by the State Board.
- That's my job. I work for the State Board. I'm appointed by the State Board. And they, in a unanimous fashion, decided to settle. And it was things that made it... changes that could be applied to any voter. It was not a partisan decision. Three of those board members had served as county board of election members. And so they were very aware of the impact that that lawsuit could have had. We had

already had other court decisions that had created quick changes for us to implement, including the ability for the visually impaired to receive a ballot electronically. We turned that around, I believe, in 21 days.

All of this is going on in the midst of a pandemic, prior to there even being vaccination. And we were seeing substantial increases by all voters requesting absentee ballots. And the other things, perhaps your concern is how I gave administrative decisions to the counties to uniformly carry out voting. My job as the chief election official and the executive director of the State Board is to ensure that all 100 counties in our oversight capacity are providing consistent service to the voters, that we're uniformly carrying out elections.

And we did so in the midst of a pandemic with the largest modern day voter history turnout that we've ever had. And ultimately... and this may be my proudest professional accomplishment ever (I don't know how to change. I don't think anything can top this.) our Health and Human Services issued a press release unbeknownst to us that there was no link between COVID and voting. And to that, knowing that I saved lives of our poll workers, of our voters, we put in processes that worked, ensured that people's ballots were counted, that people weren't disenfranchised, that they didn't fear coming out and voting. And they clearly believed in the processes we had put in place.

So, I thank you for the opportunity to defend my record and my service as an election professional for 17 years. And the confidence that has been instilled in me by the voters and by the people that I work with, including all 100 county directors. And I stand unified with them. And we call ourselves Team 101, and I'm so proud of them and the work that we accomplish and the sacrifices that they put and carry out each and every day in order to deliver voting.

Rep. McNeely: Thank you, madam. That was what I wanted to hear. Thank you.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you, Rep. McNeely. At this time, does anyone wish to exercise up to additional three minutes? Good. Representative Chesser. Representative Torbett. Representative Dahle. Queue's closed. By my calculations, that's to be nine minutes. We're going to have a hard stop at 3:30, but we don't get penalized for wrapping up before. So Representative Chesser, you're recognized for up to an additional three minutes.

Rep. Chesser: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Director Bell, again for taking that little journey with me earlier while I was trying to show the complexity of your database and just how significant it is and how hard it is for you guys to maintain the rolls, the difficulty that you have there. We didn't quite get there, but we got almost to a point where I got you to start talking about a hurdle that you had. And what I want to do is identify hurdles and how we can help remove them. So you alluded to ALEC as giving you access to the Social Security

Administration data rolls and how that ... or excuse me, what did I say? ALEC, That's a different group.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Very different group.

Rep. Chesser: Very different group. ERIC, excuse me, as an option to get you access to those. Outside of that, you alluded to a security compliance issue. What is your greatest hurdle to meet that security compliance?

Ms. Brinson Bell: So, I would like to talk through that further because I've not sat down and had a conversation with the Social Security Administration and what that entails. What I will say is my concern... ERIC came about in 2012, seven states—and at that point in time, you would consider four of them red and three of them blue. The requirements for ERIC have not changed in that time period. In 2013, the legislature authorized us to join. I don't know why my predecessor didn't. They went down the path for another group that has since disbanded and was proven to have inaccurate data. So don't want to go there again. And that's actually what my concern is that now that there have been some states that have removed themselves from ERIC, when the criteria never changed. They joined under the same membership criteria and now have decided to back out. But states like Georgia and South Carolina are still a part of it.

Rep. Chesser: Thank you. I don't really want to go down the ERIC road.

Ms. Brinson Bell: I'm sorry.

Rep. Chesser: I'm being much nicer than I have in the past. I just want to also give you a chance to respond a little more to Representative Quick's question that you answered about immigration status or citizen status on the rolls. Are there protocols in place that DMV and other affiliates that help you guys register voters take to ensure citizenship prior to offering a registered voters?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes, there are mechanisms in place with DMV. Gets more technical than I probably can talk about right here. And then there's the attestation on our voter registration forms. So, there are mechanisms.

Rep. Chesser: Those are later verified?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Well, yes and no. I mean, we don't have national voter ID, but yes, if someone becomes a citizen, then they can present their documents to us and become a registered voter.

Rep. Chesser: And you mentioned also you get daily reports from DMV. I'm assuming those are voter registration changes that they send to you with issuing new licenses, change of address, and the like.

Ms. Brinson Bell: We have a data push and pull.

Rep. Chesser: How often are actual audits done to verify the data that's in your database? I know you get daily updates, but how often do you guys intentionally audit your data?

Ms. Brinson Bell: For DMV specifically, I'd want to get back to you with an exact answer. I mean we are auditing, we're querying, we're looking at our queries. But we are also short on data staff. We have one database administrator. And he's new to our agency, I should point out, because our most experienced person retired and our junior person moved, and we don't have the means to fill those positions. So, any advocacy you could do, I saw you cringe. Thank you, please.

Rep. Chesser: And just one that should be pretty easy for you. What steps are taken? Because I'm a veteran and so just want to throw this one out there. What steps are taken to ensure the military votes are verified and fall under compliance? Because I know that was a question previously, so I'll give you that one.

Ms. Brinson Bell: You're giving me a moment, and I appreciate that, to talk about something I'm super proud of. For starters, I was recently asked by the Council of State Governments to be a part of their Overseas Voting Initiative working group that deals with our military voters. And just this week, I got to hear from military spouses and what they face. When they learned that North Carolina has our absentee portal, they were very jealous, and they wished that other states would implement such a practice and such a consideration for our military and overseas voters. A military member or spouse can utilize the federal documents and processes that are in place through FVAP, the Federal Voting Assistance Program and FWAB, the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot and all those other acronyms. Because we fully administer the UOCAVA program, the Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.

And in 2020, the legislature gave us the means or the authorization, and now we're asking to make sure that we have always the recurring means so that our military and overseas citizens can request that absentee ballot, receive it electronically, return it to us electronically through this portal, which gives us an added layer of security. It also makes it more efficient to process their ballot accurately. Prior to that period of time or putting this in place, we relied on electronic transmission to be faxed, which aren't readily available or email, which means the voter also had to have a printer, which is not often out in the field, and so on a military base even is difficult. But then they would send it back to us by email and in a time when we have to be worried about malicious links and phishing and spam and things like that, sometimes they would even go into a spam folder, and we'd have difficulty ensuring that we were getting all of the ballots to us.

Then they would arrive, and they might be postage stamp-size photo or they might be where it prints on about 12 different pieces of paper and we had to tape them together. This portal has changed the dynamic. It ensures that it's more readily available to our military and those citizens serving abroad, and it ensures the security for them and peace of mind that we are better able to cast their ballot. I don't know if that's what you were asking, but that's what makes me happy. I love that we put that in place.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Thank you, Madam Director. No, that's something that I was curious about as well. So thank you for the detail on that. And, Representative Dahle, you're recognized for up to three minutes.

Rep. Dahle: I just want to make a quick statement about immigration. My wife is an immigrant, and DMV does all of the checks. It's almost impossible to get a driver's license and be an immigrant at the... It used to be able to, but I think in 2015, the General Assembly changed that. So I just want to assure you, we've had to sit by the mailbox and wait for an extension on a visa.

I want to know something about funding. It just occurred to me. I know that you have not—in the time that I've been here, your funding requests have not been met. Do you know anything about past funding? The prior director, I think her name was Stark, were her funding requests filled, or is the State Board of Elections always kind of left to fend for themselves?

Ms. Brinson Bell: I don't completely know the answer to that. I would say that if I just... in looking at reports, we've remained rather flat at a time when over multiple administrations... our voter registration is increasing, the critical infrastructure designation, and increases in our responsibility. Even some of the laws we've passed have increased our responsibilities at the state and county level. And yet if it's flat, then that says something. We have received some federal funds in prior administration and my administration, and we rely on the legislature to not only accept those, but to help us designate how they're going to be spent. And in 2020 when we got our largest funding from the federal government, it had been our hope that we would use that for the 'SEIMS modernization effort and then that would've saved the state money there.

However, it was an agreement, and I don't dispute this, but most of that money, about three-fourths of it, was sent down to the county level. Again, they need that money as well, but we have to remember that if we had applied it to 'SEIMS modernization, that's something that benefits all 100 counties. So now we're looking for that money because that is a required state-supported system. So that means that there were areas where we didn't receive funding.

There's also been some of the designations of the federal funding that has restricted how we could continue certain processes. So some of the positions that have been done away with were funded through the federal funds, and I'm

no longer able to continue those because they've been designated in other ways.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Yep. Thank you, Representative Dahle. And Representative Torbett, you are the last speaker and you're recognized for up to three minutes.

Rep. Torbett: Bless you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. And thank you again, ma'am, for being here with us today, and hopefully you've had as much fun as we've had today, so.

Ms. Brinson Bell: I actually love talking about elections.

Rep. Torbett: I can sense that. My question is two-part. First part is about purge. How often do you purge deceased/duplicate registrations?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Please know that I don't use the "P word" because that implies that somewhere they go away and we don't maintain those records. But our database has a record of every voter that has ever been registered.

Rep. Torbett: What would be the proper way to say they're no longer counted as an eligible voter?

Ms. Brinson Bell: That's our list maintenance process that we were talking about earlier. So, if someone is not active in an election, does not participate in an election, for two federal elections, then we initiate the list maintenance process where we will send a notice to them, and that's a point of contact. If it comes back to us as undeliverable, then we can move them into "inactive" status. We have opportunity over two more federal elections to have contact with them, for them to present themselves to vote and update their information. And if not, then they are then moved to "removed" status.

Rep. Torbett: Okay. Real quick, deceased. How often do you get updated on deceased?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Right. So, thank you. So, on deceased voters, we receive information from Vital Records on a monthly basis. And then some of the counties do have a different frequency that they may also get it from their Register [of Deeds].

Rep. Torbett: And do you randomly look for duplicate registrations?

Ms. Brinson Bell: Not randomly. We have—

Rep. Torbett: A system.

Ms. Brinson Bell: A system in place methodically, and I can provide that as well in our list maintenance—

- Rep. Torbett: Real quick, I'm sure it's done somewhat in a system or every so often. How soon after an election is not the purge, but the—
- Ms. Brinson Bell: The list maintenance?
- Rep. Torbett: I think the list maintenance is performed.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: So, following a federal general election, we then between January and April—that's when the window is that we initiate that process—go through the different mailings, and the counties conduct that work.
- Rep. Torbett: My final question, you being essentially a department for the state and people of North Carolina, thank you for your service, but voter ID being a new implementation coming into the system here, have y'all determined rules to go by internally to address voter ID? And if so, are we able to get a copy of those rules or to know what those action items might be in the implementation of it?
- Ms. Brinson Bell: So just the tasks that we need to carry out. There's not necessarily particular rules to that but the rules of how, for example, the precinct officials will review an ID that may have a question around it and so forth, that is part of the proposed rules that I mentioned that the State Board sent out for public comment. At their last meeting they were having that public comment. Now it...tomorrow [June 23, 2023] is the last day, so we would welcome additional public comment: ncsbe.gov/voterid is the website.
- Rep. Torbett: What was that website one more—
- Ms. Brinson Bell: [Ncsbe.gov/voterid](https://ncsbe.gov/voterid). And so the proposed rules are posted there, and then once that public comment period ends on Friday, we will give recommendations to the State Board members. They'll be able to review them as well to see if they want to make any adjustments to those rules before hopefully adopting on Tuesday during the State Board meeting. And then it follows the Rules Review Commission process. And so that gets sent over to them. We're looking at these as temporary rules because that actually moves them along more quickly. And I believe the Rules Review Commission would be able to take those up, I think, during their July meeting if I'm following the timetables correctly. And then that puts it in place for the municipal.
- Rep. Torbett: And the last part of that is that I'm assuming that goes that where if 10 North Carolinians have issues, they can bring them forward. And that is part of that rule-making process.
- Ms. Brinson Bell: The intent of rule-making is that they would comment on the rules. We've had a lot of input about people who like or dislike voter ID. And candidly, we have to say to them, "If you have concerns about that, talk to the legislature."

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Rep. Torbett: And we get that quite frequently.

Ms. Brinson Bell: Yes, I'm sure.

Rep. Johnson (Chair): Perfect.

Rep. Johnson, Chair: Well, that is the end of the three minutes and committee members, guest presenters, thank y'all for being here today. I'm sorry we got a little bit of a late start. We had an unexpected caucus, but we have a hard stop at 3:30, and it looks like we're hitting it right on the dot. But I think we all have a common goal of coming together and approving these bills. Make sure it's easier to vote, hard to cheat. Make sure that we close the loopholes that are out there. Director Brinson Bell, thank you so much for being here. This committee's adjourned.

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