



# JOY GOEBEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 5<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## AB 577 – Election Worker Protection Act Testimony

Honorable Chairman Krug and members of the committee:

This legislation addresses important issues related to the safety, security, and well-being of election officials, and it is a crucial step in ensuring the integrity of our democratic processes.

- 1. Protection of Election Officials' Personally Identifiable Information:** The provision prohibiting public access to records containing the personally identifiable information of election officials is a necessary safeguard. Election officials play a critical role in our democracy, and they should not be subjected to unnecessary risks or harassment. This change aligns with existing protections for public officers and applicants for public positions, recognizing that election officials should be treated with the same level of respect and privacy.
- 2. Bodily Harm to Election Officials:** Elevating the penalty for causing bodily harm to an election official to a Class I felony is a significant and appropriate response. Election officials must be able to carry out their duties without fear of physical harm, intimidation, or interference. This change sends a clear message that such actions will not be tolerated and should act as a strong deterrent.
- 3. Harassment of Election Officials:** The bill addresses the harassment of election officials, especially via social media, by imposing penalties that reflect the gravity of such actions. The increased penalties when these actions are taken against election officials acknowledge the unique challenges they face in the performance of their duties. It is essential that our election officials can carry out their work without the threat of harassment. Confidentiality of election officials who are victims of stalking or harassment is a crucial measure to protect their safety. Election officials should not be targeted because of their roles, and this bill ensures that they have access to the same protections as other victims of abuse. It is a sensible and compassionate addition to the bill.
- 4. Whistleblower Protections:** The inclusion of whistleblower protections for municipal clerks, county clerks, and election officials is a commendable step. In order to maintain the integrity of our electoral system, we must encourage individuals to come forward when they witness election fraud or irregularities. Protecting these individuals from employment discrimination ensures that they can fulfill their roles without fear of retaliation, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability in our elections.

In conclusion, this bill is a comprehensive and necessary response to the challenges faced by election officials. By protecting their personal information, addressing harassment, and ensuring appropriate penalties for those who cause them harm, this legislation strengthens our democratic processes and the individuals who make them possible. I strongly urge you to support this bill to safeguard our democracy and protect those who are on the front lines of our elections.

Thank You,

Rep. Joy Goeben



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## Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

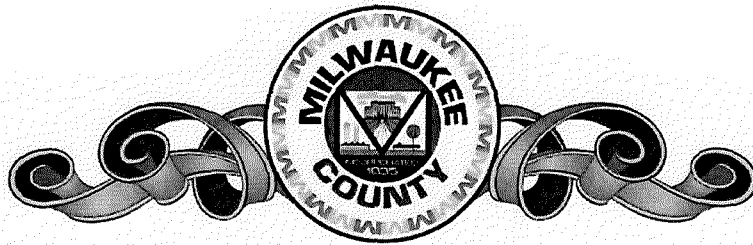
### Assembly Bill 577

November 2, 2023

Thank you Chair Krug, Vice-Chair Maxey, and members of the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill (AB) 577. If passed, AB 577 would create protections of election officials' personal information, increase penalties for battery and harassment against election officials, and establish whistleblower protection for municipal clerks, county clerks, and election officials who witness and report election fraud or irregularities.

Recent concerns over the security and integrity of elections has led to a large number of election workers refusing to administer our upcoming elections. A large reduction in those working as election officials will result in greater workloads and stress for those continuing to serve. This may result in increased inefficiencies, delayed results, and other issues on Election Day. The most common reason these election officials refuse to return for the next cycle is because they have been harassed while doing their job. AB 577 creates a deterrent by increasing penalties for physical assault and harassment and creates additional protection of personally identifiable information from being disseminated maliciously. Finally, protections are included for those who witness wrongdoing to report it to the appropriate authorities.

Thank you for your kind consideration of AB 577. Unfortunately, due to a scheduling conflict I could not attend the hearing today. If you have any questions, please reach out to my office, and my staff will be able to answer any questions you may have.



## GEORGE L. CHRISTENSON MILWAUKEE COUNTY CLERK

I write to express support for Assembly Bill 577, which aims to improve the safety of election officials throughout the State of Wisconsin, thus helping ensure the overall security of our democracy. From the state level to counties, cities, towns, and villages in Wisconsin, election officials provide a critical service and are essential to the overall administration of the election process. In Milwaukee County alone, we have over 200 polling locations on any countywide election day and eight municipal governments that process absentee ballots at a central count location. There are thousands of election officials who work tirelessly to ensure every eligible person who wishes may participate in the constitutional right to cast their ballot and to have their vote counted.

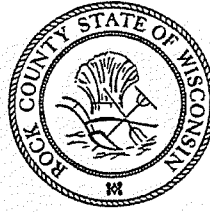
Since 2020, we have witnessed shocking instances of violent behaviors and intimidation directed towards election officials in Milwaukee County, in Wisconsin, and throughout the nation. These threats show up by way of emails, voicemails, and personal verbal and physical threats against the dedicated public servants who stand at the front door of our democracy. Sadly, some of our hard-working public servants have even received death threats. It should not be a surprise to anyone that because of this unbelievable behavior, we have also seen an unprecedented departure of election officials at all levels of government in Wisconsin and all across the country. Regretfully, they take with them years of institutional knowledge and experience and all because these individuals find themselves fearful of simply doing their jobs. This abusive and criminal behavior should not be tolerated any longer.

Election officials are essential to the free, fair, safe, and accessible administration of Wisconsin elections and we must act to ensure the safety of these dedicated public servants. Assembly Bill 577 demonstrates the serious nature of these unacceptable behaviors and makes it clear that such attacks on election officials in Wisconsin will not be tolerated. The protection of election officials is essential to the welfare of our democracy.

**ROCK COUNTY, WISCONSIN**

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November 2, 2023

Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections:

Testimony for Public Hearing

Chair Krug and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing testimony today.

***Assembly Bill 577 – relating to: an election official's personal information; battery against election officials; whistleblower protection for municipal clerks, county clerks, and election officials who witness and report election fraud or irregularities; harassing election officials; and providing a penalty.***

**INFORMATIONAL**

This bill recognizes the importance of protecting our election officials. This recognition is greatly appreciated.

After reviewing this bill there are a couple of items that need to be clarified or modified.

- Section 3 of the bill states that neither the municipal clerk nor a county clerk shall provide access to records containing the personally identifiable information of an election official, except that an authority may provide access to the name of the election official and the city state where the official resides.
  - At first look this sounds as if an individual requests a list of election officials, then the list to be released will only include the election officials first and last name, city and state.
  - What about other records? The county clerk has poll books which contain registered voter addresses.
- Section 4:
  - Is there a reporting mechanism? Or is that already in another statute?

Thank you for your consideration,

Lisa Tollefson