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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue,
Elections and Consumer Protection*

Senator André Jacque

September 26, 2023

Thank you Chairman Knodl and Colleagues for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you in support of Senate Bill 291, the Election Worker Protection Act.

I am proud to bring this legislation forward after the events of the past few years and discussions with local clerks and pollworkers, and I am pleased to note the strong bi-partisan support it enjoys from both legislators and county clerks from across Wisconsin. Free, fair, and peaceful elections are the bedrock of representative government. Voters who participate in our elections should expect these guarantees, as should those who work at the polls.

The purpose of Senate Bill 291 is to provide safeguards and protections for those hard-working people who make our elections run smoothly and for them to feel safe while conducting their duties in the State of Wisconsin. Election workers are the backbone of successful elections and deserve to operate without fear for their personal safety or job security.

Under this bill, “election official” means an individual who is charged with any duties relating to the conduct of an election:

- First, the bill prohibits the disclosure of personally identifiable information of election officials or election registration officials.
- Next, the bill makes it a Class I felony to intentionally cause bodily harm to an election official acting in that person’s official capacity, simply trying to do their job the best they can.
- Finally, the bill provides whistleblower protection to an election official’s employment if the election official lawfully reports what he or she believes are election irregularities.

Extending these protections to our public-minded friends and neighbors striving to perform their civic duty is not a partisan issue. Working at the polls should be as safe as it is rewarding to participate in the elections process.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 291. I’d be happy to answer any questions.



Joy Goeben

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 5th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

September 26, 2023

SB 291

AB 300: Election Worker Protections

The purpose of AB 300 is to provide safeguards and protections for our state's hard-working election officials. We want them to feel safe while conducting their duties – they deserve to do their job without fear for their personal safety or their job security. To accomplish this goal, the bill does three things:

First, the bill prohibits the disclosure of the personally identifiable information of election officials, keeping their homes and families safe. I think we can all agree that a person who is doing their job should not have to fear that their personally identifiable information, including home address, nor where one of these people works for a “day” job, should be disclosed.

Second, the bill makes it a Class I felony to intentionally cause bodily harm to an election official acting in that person's official capacity. This bill makes it clear that assaulting an election official performing their duty will not be tolerated.

It is true that Wisconsin already has strict criminal laws regarding assault and battery, and some may say that there is no need to specify that it is a crime to commit these acts against an election worker, but my co-author and I believe it is necessary to make this purposeful declaration: if you punch someone it's a crime and yes, it is the same crime if you punch an election worker who is just doing his or her job. Don't do it.

We all know passions run high during elections. This simple act of clearly specifying the crime of assaulting an election official, in whatever capacity they are acting, is wrong and it is a crime in Wisconsin. This provision underlines and highlights the importance of keeping our elections civil.

Third, the bill protects an election officials job by providing whistleblower protection if he or she lawfully reports election irregularities. This is just common sense. This bill makes it clear that if anyone who works or volunteers at an election site sees something they believe to be amiss should not be afraid for their job, livelihood, or even their sense of volunteering for a civic duty because they saw something that they aren't sure about.

And especially in the rare instance when what is witnessed turns out to be a real problem: protecting the person who reports this situation should be obvious. No election official should be afraid of retaliation for disclosing illegal, unethical, or inappropriate activity, whether by physical harm, a fear from invasion of their privacy, or their job security.

REPRESENTATIVE
SYLVIA ORTIZ-VELEZ
ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 8

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this committee,

I support AB 300 because the bill protects our election workers in a time when personal safety has become a real issue. I spoke to several election workers including Milwaukee County Clerk, George Christensen about challenges and fears that people experienced during the 2020 election.

Elections workers in our state experienced situations where they had to have law enforcement stationed at their home to keep them safe to do their jobs. AB300 makes sure we are guarding the identifiable information to protect people from being doxed. AB 300 also addresses the real concerns about the seriousness of harming our election workers. This bill would make it a felony to actually physically assault our elections workers. Finally, the bill ensures that people are protected in their roles for doing their job without fear of retaliation if they report discrepancies or irregularities.

We need to protect the front line of our democracy and we need to ensure that people feel protected when they are doing their jobs. We want them to feel safe entirely within their roles.

Thank you,

Representative Ortiz-Velez

