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

**Senator André Jacque**

*January 25, 2024*

Chairman Knodl and Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you in support of Senate Bill 632 and Assembly Bill 577, the Election Worker Protection Act.

I've introduced this legislation in response to the events of the past few years and numerous discussions with local clerks and poll workers, 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 632/Assembly Bill 577 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.

I am pleased to have authored the remarkably similar Senate Bill 291 which already passed this committee unanimously this session and the full Senate on a voice vote. Assembly Bill 577 has also passed the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee unanimously and the full Assembly on a voice vote.

Thank you for your consideration, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.



# JOY GOEBEN

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

January 25, 2024

## Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection Testimony in Favor of AB 577

Honorable Chairman Knodl 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,

*Joy Goeben*

## **AB 577 Senate Amendment Testimony**

### **January 25, 2024**

Thank you Chair Knodl, and good morning, members. My name is Edgar Lin, and I am Protect Democracy's Wisconsin policy lead & counsel. Protect Democracy is a cross-ideological nonprofit organization—we defend elections, the rule of law, and fact-based political debate against authoritarian threats—regardless of who wins or who is in power. A central focus of my legislative work is on policies and legislation that can strengthen protections for our election workers.

At a Wispolitics panel three months ago on election administration with Chair Krug and Representative Snodgrass, an audience member expressed concerns among the elderly population working at the polls. He noted they have been poll workers for decades, and they are actually afraid to work the polls given the current environment. He expressed appreciation for their committee's effort in addressing this pressing issue.

I'll start by also expressing my sincere appreciation for this committee's continued work on this important issue. I am heartened by the tremendous improvements in this bill amendment. Today, I'd like to discuss the new additions to this bill and highlight its outstanding qualities.

Election workers are an essential part of the voting ecosystem, without them, the voting process cannot be sustained. Wisconsin's democracy cannot work without free and fair elections, which cannot work without voluntary election workers—who are made up of our neighbors, family, and friends.

Yet, our election workers are left with little or no protection as the administrators of our election system. They have experienced harassment, intimidation, doxxing<sup>1</sup>, and disrespect. Importantly, election workers are being subjected to these bad acts regardless of their political affiliation and regardless of where they live.

A national survey of almost 11,000 local election officials last year show that:

- 21% of local election officials may be departing for the 2024 election.
- 30% of election officials have been personally abused, harassed, or threatened.
- Nearly 3 in 4 election officials believe threats have increased in recent years.

Not only does the bill protect election officials' personal identifying information such as their home address and phone number from open records requests, but the new

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Languages: Search for and publish private or identifying information about (a particular individual) on the internet, typically with malicious intent.

addition also prohibits doxing against election officials and their families. It also creates a civil cause of action for election officials who have been targets of doxing. This gives election officials the autonomy to pursue their own legal action without necessarily relying on state actors.

Election officials can go home knowing that our state government is taking threats against them seriously. These protections not only guarantee past, present, and future election officials a genuine sense of personal safety and security, but also serve to reinforce the integrity of our democratic process.

Edgar Lin  
Protect Democracy  
WI Policy Strategist & Counsel