



Appropriations Committee General Government A Subcommittee:

February 13, 2020

TESTIMONY OF SECRETARY OF THE STATE DENISE W. MERRILL:

Good morning Co-Chairs Winfield and Ryan, and Ranking Members Formica and Dauphinais, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Denise Merrill and I am the Secretary of the State of Connecticut.

As all of you know, the Secretary of the State's office hosts a number of departments, including elections administration, publications, and business services, some of which generate considerable revenue for the state. In Fiscal Year 2019, my office generated more than \$33 million annually in fees and has generated almost \$19 million in Fiscal Year 2020 to date. The revenue generated by my office goes into the General Fund. Our annual operating expenses totaled roughly \$6.5 million in Fiscal Year 2019 — less than one-fifth of the revenue generated by the office — and the office has become leaner in recent years, which was done without impacting the service we provide to the public. When I was elected Secretary of the State, there were 85 employees of this office; today there are 69 funded positions. Modernizations we introduced over the last several years have helped this office keep up with demand despite a smaller head count.

The challenges of our office have changed as well. When I became president of the National Association of Secretaries of State in July 2016, cybersecurity was hardly mentioned at our annual convention; at our recent convention virtually every panel, training, and workshop focused on ensuring that our elections remain safe from cyberattacks and the spread of pernicious disinformation.

As you are aware, in September 2017, we learned from the federal Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that Connecticut was one of the states that agents of the Russian government targeted with cyberscans of our public-facing online election infrastructure. Our perimeter

security successfully turned this scan away. In laymen's terms, the Russians rattled the doors and windows, but Connecticut's locks and alarm systems held firm.

I and members of my staff are in constant contact with federal authorities and one thing is crystal clear: Foreign actors aren't done trying to interfere in American elections. As one of my colleagues put it at a recent meeting: It is a lot cheaper to disrupt American elections and sow distrust with the American public than it is to buy an aircraft carrier or a submarine.

In classified briefings I have attended, DHS has made it clear that Russia isn't the only country seeking to interfere with our elections; China, Iran, and others have also emerged as threats.

The election administration world has changed, it has changed quickly, and not for the better. Connecticut must be prepared for the new future of election security – cybersecurity.

As a result of the designation of the tools of election administration as critical infrastructure, our office has taken advantage of every opportunity offered by the federal government. We are members of both MS- and EI-ISAC, we use Albert Network Monitoring, have had a full Risk and Vulnerability Assessment performed by DHS, and have participated in multiple tabletop cyberincident exercises, including with our election administration partners at the local level. We have already started the process of meeting with federal and state law enforcement and cybersecurity specialists to prepare for the 2020 election.

Our office is taking every action, working with every partner, and taking advantage of every federal program we can in order to ensure that our elections are safe from foreign interference. I am sitting before you today to request the necessary resources to protect our elections before what is sure to be one of the most pivotal, and contested, elections in our nation's history.

I have sat where you sit today, and I know how difficult your task is. In an era of difficult budget decisions, it is never easy to ask for more money, and I wouldn't be here if the threat was not very real and very serious.

I am asking you for the resources that the Secretary of the State's office needs to ensure that Connecticut's elections remain among the best, most trustworthy, and protected elections in the United States, and the world. Cybersecurity is now a permanent feature of election administration, and we as a state must treat it as such.

I am asking you to appropriate the funds necessary to hire the Information Technology Analyst position that was included in the administration's budget proposal. This position will be the key cybersecurity asset within the Office of the Secretary of the State, with specialized knowledge of cybersecurity related to election infrastructure and responsibility for working with federal, state, and local officials to ensure best practices, coordinate incident responses, and protect our elections from attack.

The threat of interference is real, and I have been part of the national planning process to ensure that our elections remain free and fair. We are, and will always be, doing everything possible to protect the security of Connecticut elections – from training local officials to full assessments of our system to working with the federal government to develop best practices.

The federal Help America Act Funds we received last year and the new round we will receive this year will be a tremendous help, but they are temporary. We need the resources to make cybersecurity a permanent function of the election administration of this office, including training and coordinating with local governments, across state government, and with the federal government.

Cyberattacks will be a permanent threat to our election administration for the foreseeable future. We have reached a critical juncture in the history of American elections. Hostile foreign powers that are attempting to interfere with our elections aren't just trying hack our elections, they are trying to hack the minds of the American people by sowing distrust of the very governmental institutions that make America the greatest democracy in the world – our free and fair elections. We must commit to both stop any attempted interference and to let every Connecticut resident know that we are doing everything we can do to successfully protect our elections.

Thank you for partnering with me, and with all of our local election officials, in this effort.