

H. 541 Testimony regarding threatening or interfering with election officials.

TO: Vermont House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Sally Ober, Lincoln Town Clerk, 62 Quaker Street, Lincoln, VT 05443
clerk@lincolnvermont.org, (802) 453-4501

DATE of HEARING: Thursday, January 15, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

RE: H. 541

Greetings Chair LaLonde and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering this important topic of interference with election officials and the process of voting. Voting is part of the foundation of our democracy and we must be ever vigilant to protect it. I am here today as a member of the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association (VMCTA). Our mission is to provide education, mentoring, advocacy, and more to Town and City Clerks and Treasurers of Vermont. Our VMCTA Executive Board just recently adopted a resolution, condemning interference and threats toward election officials. (Read the attached statement.)

I have been serving as an elected town clerk in Lincoln for nearly 20 years. I consider my job of running elections, to be among my most important duties. Elections are run locally in Vermont and the results matter nationally. For all of my life, I expected that the elections in the United States were run freely and fairly, without tampering. When I became a town clerk in 2006, my assumptions were confirmed. Town Clerks and local election officials take their jobs very seriously, and we do everything in our power to run elections according to law. In my experience, our laws are set up well to ensure election integrity.

It wasn't until 2016, that my assumptions were rattled. Just days before the November General Election, I received a disturbing email with about a 7-page "manifesto", informing me that there was a CIA terrorist cult in Vermont, and if I didn't pay attention, people were going to die. This message was so long and involved, I barely had the capacity to read the whole thing, because we clerks have a lot to do in the final days before an election. I was alone in the office, and it really upset me. I didn't know whether to dismiss this email as "junk" or do something. Because it involved threats of death to unknown persons, I reached out to our Secretary of State's Office and reported it. When I tried to block this sender, they sent me another message from a slightly different email address, just before the next federal election.

Since 2016, I now expect to receive some sort of disturbing or time-consuming message in my inbox before federal elections. One year, all Vermont town clerks got an email about registering someone to vote. This person had a very complex story, and they wanted to vote for a certain candidate. The complexity of the question prompted some clerks to ask for advice on our association's online listserv. We found out that every clerk in VT got the same emailed request, some wanting to vote for "candidate X" and some for "candidate Y". It felt like we were all being tested on how we would respond. We got the Director of Elections involved and clerks were informed to disregard that message. Taking the time to respond to this fake request, interfered with our election duties.

Before another election, clerks in Vermont got emails informing us that our vote tabulator machines were corrupted and we should cancel the election because the results would not be valid. This sent many clerks into a frenzy, trying to figure out how to handle the situation. Canceling an election is not within the authority of town clerks, nor of the Secretary of State. The way to invalidate an election is after the fact, by following a legal complaint procedure.

In 2024, a threat came much closer to me personally. A voter whom I know, came into our office with his adult son to pay his taxes before the General Election. He often gives me a hard time about elections and this time he told me that if a certain candidate won the Presidential election, there would be war, and he would send his son to fight. It wasn't until after they left that I wondered whether I was being included as a target in this war. I don't know if this voter is connected to the other email threats I get, but this one felt much more personal. I stopped my election preparations to report it to the FBI, which took quite a lot of my time. All of these incidents are distracting from doing the work we clerks need to do, to be well-prepared for running free and fair elections.

Making the penalty for interfering with election officials more than a misdemeanor, will hopefully be a greater deterrent for people to disrupt our work. Threats and interference toward election officials and volunteers can drive out good people from doing a very challenging but important job for our country. I hope H.541 can help.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.