

Chairman
David J. Betras



MAHONING COUNTY
BOARD OF ELECTIONS
Your vote counts!

Director
Thomas McCabe

Deputy Director
Melissa Wasko

Board Members
Sandra L. Barger
Lisa Robinson
Denise G. Bayer

Secretary Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State
Re: Mahoning County Board of Elections Facilities and Security

Dear Secretary LaRose:

Thank you very much for your November 7th letter and for taking such a personal and proactive interest in the circumstances surrounding the Mahoning County Board of Elections. We in Mahoning County truly appreciate your concern and your attentiveness to the challenges we have recently faced. Your ongoing commitment to safeguarding the integrity and accessibility of elections across Ohio, and your willingness to engage directly with us as partners in that effort, is both encouraging and deeply valued.

Over the past years, I have made many presentations to the Mahoning County Commissioners raising concerns about the condition of the Board of Elections building and the very type of incident that ultimately occurred. In fact, almost exactly one year before the September 29, 2025 leak, I specifically warned the commissioners that such a failure in the aging infrastructure was not only possible, but increasingly likely. Unfortunately, those concerns proved prescient. While we were extremely fortunate that the leak occurred during work hours—allowing staff to respond immediately and prevent what could have been the loss of millions of dollars' worth of voting equipment—the risk we faced underscores the seriousness of the facility's deficiencies. I have appeared before the commissioners numerous times, documented the deplorable conditions through photographs, and in one of my presentations I provided them with the very materials you referenced in your letter, including Chapter 3 of the Election Official Manual and Directive 2025-29. It was therefore disappointing to later hear public statements suggesting that these directives were unknown to them, as this is simply not accurate.

With respect to your inquiry about any remaining deficiencies under Directive 2025-29 and Chapter 3 of the Election Official Manual, I can report the following. Regarding cybersecurity, we recently underwent a comprehensive audit, and we are in the process of completing the required documentation now being requested. I want to specifically commend Chris Rakocy for his outstanding efforts and leadership in helping us move this work forward expeditiously and thoroughly. We are in full compliance with the cyber security directives.

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The more substantial challenges lie in the facility-based requirements, and I will outline where we currently stand in both compliance and non-compliance. Significant progress only began after I stated publicly at a county commissioner meeting that the Board of Elections was out of compliance and that urgent action was necessary. For example, we have only recently brought the facility into compliance with the required fire suppression systems. This development occurred after your deadline—not due to any lack of effort or willingness on the part of the Board, but because the county commissioners delayed in responding to our repeated requests. We remain out of compliance with the alarm system; however, we have been assured that this work will be completed by December 1.

With respect to the water-incursion issue, the affected pipes were temporarily shut off, but they are now back in operation, and our voting machines remain beneath them. The current facility simply does not provide us with any physical alternative or the capacity to remedy this risk. While the optimal and safest long-term solution is to house our election offices and our voting equipment in the same secure facility, we have not been provided with another suitable site for the machines. We continue to be told that a new home for the Board of Elections is forthcoming, but as of the date of this letter, no concrete plan or timeline has been presented to us. I truly appreciate, as you note in your closing paragraph, your willingness to work with us to ensure Mahoning County elections remain secure and reliable. However, until we are provided with a new building—one that meets the basic structural, environmental, and security requirements needed for modern election administration—we cannot be assured that another catastrophic facility failure will not occur. Indeed, earlier this summer we were forced to close the office due to an air-conditioning system failure and pervasive odors emanating from the building. The bottom line is that without a new home for the Mahoning County Board of Elections, we remain at significant and unacceptable risk.

Thank you again for your attention to these matters and for your continued partnership as we work to fulfill our obligations under your leadership and under state law to ensure secure, reliable elections for the voters of Mahoning County. I stand ready to provide any additional information you may need.

Respectfully,

David Betras
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