



Cranston Canvassing Authority

Update to the City Council on Federal Election Changes

Nick Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections

April 28, 2025



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



Election Administration in the United States and in Rhode Island

- Most states run elections at the local county level under their state laws with varying degrees of state control and oversight
- RI is a “top-down” state with significant oversight and authority vested in the RI BOE and SOS over the 39 local BOCs in the conduct of all Title 17 election operations
- Per the U.S. Constitution’s Elections Clause, federal elections “shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof” and “Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations”
- Rhode Island’s Constitution vests power over elections in the General Assembly, which created the 39 boards of canvassers to administer federal, state, and local elections under the direction of the state BOE, which also holds other duties
- The RI SOS is the state’s chief election official under HAVA and maintains the Central Voter Registration System, among other elections duties
- The General Assembly passes the bulk of laws that control our elections and voter registration. Others are controlled by federal HAVA, NVRA (Motor Voter), UOCAVA (military/overseas voters), etc.



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

What is the United States Election Assistance Commission?

- Independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress via the 2002 passage of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA)
- Two Republican and Two Democratic Commissioners appointed by the President with Senate confirmation to 4-year terms
- Oversees several bipartisan federal advisory boards consisting of 100+ sworn state and local election officials
- Mr. Lima is a sworn member of the EAC Standards Board, appointed by R.I. Secretary of State Gregg M. Amore, and the EAC Local Leadership Council, appointed by the R.I. Town and City Clerks' Association
- Both are meeting the week of April 21 in Charlotte, North Carolina
- The EAC Standards Board holds a major role in reviewing the VVSG 2.0
- Per FACA, this presentation does not represent the EAC, nor its advisory boards



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

The President's Executive Order

“PRESERVING
AND PROTECTING
THE INTEGRITY
OF AMERICAN
ELECTIONS”



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

What the President's Executive Order directs

Passport or similar document requirement on federal registration form

- Require citizens to produce a passport or similar document to register to vote
- Orders instructions to the (EAC) to change the federal voter registration form to add this requirement, contrary to numerous federal laws
- States that don't comply by using this form would face withholding of federal HAVA funding

Targeting military and overseas voters

- Directs DOD to add the “show-your-papers” requirement to FPCAs, as well as an additional requirement to prove their eligibility in Rhode Island
- Unclear how deployed soldiers, sailors, diplomats, and other U.S. Citizens overseas could present these documents in-person to Cranston election officials; conflicts directly with UOCAVA

Voting system decertification

- Directs the EAC to decertify voting systems “if appropriate” and enact new requirements within 180 days – an unrealistic timeline
- Nationwide cost of billions of dollars to purchase new voting equipment, prior to the 2026 elections, without any federal funding



What the President's Executive Order directs (Continued)

DOGE and Homeland Security access to all voter data

- The order grants DOGE and DHS full access to voter files and voter list maintenance records, including those maintained by Cranston, using subpoena power “where necessary”
- Neither agency has established expertise in voter registration records, which contain significant PII and confidential information

Coercing changes to state mail and absentee ballot deadlines

- Orders the EAC to withhold funds from 18 states, including Rhode Island, that receive mail ballots voted by Election Day after Election Day (RI allows overseas/military mail ballots to be received within 7 days of Election Day)

Demanding cooperation from states by withholding funding

- The order attempts to demand states share information with the Department of Justice and cooperate in the Department's efforts to prosecute election crimes
- Specifically, the order asks the attorney general to withhold grants and funds, including federal grants and funds used for police and other law enforcement purposes

(Information on these slides is cited from the Brennan Center, “The President's Executive Order on Elections, Explained, April 1, 2025)



Loss of federal HAVA funding for election security and voting equipment

- RI has received \$22.2 million in HAVA funding to date since 2004
- HAVA funding purchased the bulk of all voting equipment we use in our elections, and upgraded our state's elections cybersecurity and registration systems
- Cranston BOC has received over \$115,000 in HAVA grant funding from Secretaries of State Nellie M. Gorbea and Gregg M. Amore since 2019
- HAVA upgraded servers, all City Hall staff training, city IT infrastructure, computers, scanners, city's dot gov domain, and network architecture



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025

Voting system decertification

- The EAC certifies the voting systems used in American elections
- R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-19-3 (a)(7) requires our voting equipment to be federally certified
- The timeline for the EAC to certify the new VVSG standards, directed by the President, is not feasible or compliant with federal law
- No voting equipment currently exists that meets VVSG 2.0 standards (vendors are developing the next generation of voting systems to these standards)



Impacts to the City of Cranston

- Uncertainty about the state's compliance with federal law for the voting equipment we use in all elections, and significant costs for equipment upgrades that will reduce the state's resources and staff time to provide local election support
- Potential accelerated and unworkable timeline from the EAC, if they act as directed by the President
- Disenfranchisement of voters due to unprecedented DPOC requirements, amounting to a poll tax
- Disenfranchisement of overseas/military voters who are from Cranston. In November 2024, about 215 Cranston voters were in this category
- Loss of significant federal funding for failure to comply
- Potential for DOGE or DHS to subpoena our confidential voter records for all Cranston voters, and compromise that data, or issue misleading public narratives that erode voter trust and confidence



Litigation challenging the President's Executive Order to date

Five lawsuits filed as of April 11, 2025

- [Democratic National Committee v. Trump](#)*
- [League of United Latin American Citizens \(LULAC\) v. Executive Office of the President](#)*
- [League of Women Voters Education Fund v. Trump](#)*
- [Washington v. Trump](#)
- [State of California v. Trump](#)

R.I. Attorney General Peter F. Neronha signed on to *California v. Trump* as part of a coalition of 19 states

Due to impending deadlines set by the Executive Order, this case will hear argument soon, and is assigned to U.S. District Court in Massachusetts

**These three lawsuits have been merged since their initial filings*



Executive Order legality and outlook

- Ben Ginsberg, who was national counsel to the Bush and Romney campaigns in 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012, a central figure in the 2000 Bush v. Gore recount, and appointed by President Obama to co-chair the 2013 Presidential Commission on Election Administration
- Ginsberg is one of the most experienced and distinguished experts on election law in United States history
- “Whether you are a MAGA-affiliated, Democrat, or Republican election official, and whether or not you agree with the overall policy goals, it just doesn’t work as a practical matter” – *Ben Ginsberg*
- *Votebeat*, paraphrasing Ginsberg: “None of the drafters appear to have consulted a single election administrator, and the instructions in the executive order would be hard — if not flatly impossible — to put in place.”

Outlook: the U.S. Supreme Court has been unpredictable in recent rulings on what challenges it chooses to rule in favor of, or in opposition to, the President’s asserting of new executive authority to act unilaterally, on a wide range of policy matters

It should be clear the President does not have Constitutional authority to direct mass changes to election law, however, he has done so anyway



Consideration by Congress of the SAVE Act

Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act (H.R.22)



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

SAVE Act Effects

- Most significant impact on voter registration in modern U.S. history
- DPOC required to register and again for all changes or updates (party, name, address, etc.)
- Adds federal criminal penalties for local election officials who make mistakes when registering voters
- Adds private right of action to sue election offices and officials
- Makes illegal, or impractical, voter registration drives, online voter registration, mail-in voter registration, and overseas/military registration



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

SAVE Act impacts on the Cranston Board of Canvassers

- Our bipartisan Board voted unanimously, 3-0, on March 19, 2025 to oppose the SAVE Act as currently drafted
- If enacted as drafted, the Canvassing Authority would likely need 2 to 3 additional full-time employees
- All 60,000 registered voters in Cranston would be required to re-register to vote, in-person, at City Hall in front of an election official, providing a certified, original vital record birth certificate, U.S. Passport, or similar document
- The same documents would be required every time they update their name, address, or party
- Thousands of married persons, and any other voter whose name does not match their birth certificate, would additionally be required to provide their original, certified marriage license and/or name change documentation each time they register to vote with us
- The City Clerks office would likely need additional full-time staff due to the unprecedented increase in requests for certified copies of vital records this would cause



SAVE Act impacts on the Cranston Board of Canvassers (Continued)

- If any election official makes even an honest mistake in registering one voter without the required federal documentation, that official would be subject to serious criminal penalties from federal law enforcement
- Adds a private right to action which would mean any individual could file suit against the city if they believe our office is not doing a good enough job
- Requires our office to also verify citizenship of all voters on an ongoing basis against federal databases that are presently incomplete and highly inaccurate, resulting in additional mass disenfranchisement of Cranston voters
- Zero funding is provided or considered by Congress for any of these federal mandates
- Nearly half of all voters do not have a U.S. Passport
- RI Real ID driver's licenses are not sufficient to register
- The SAVE Act, if enacted, takes immediate effect upon the President's signature, with no implementation grace period or timeline contemplated

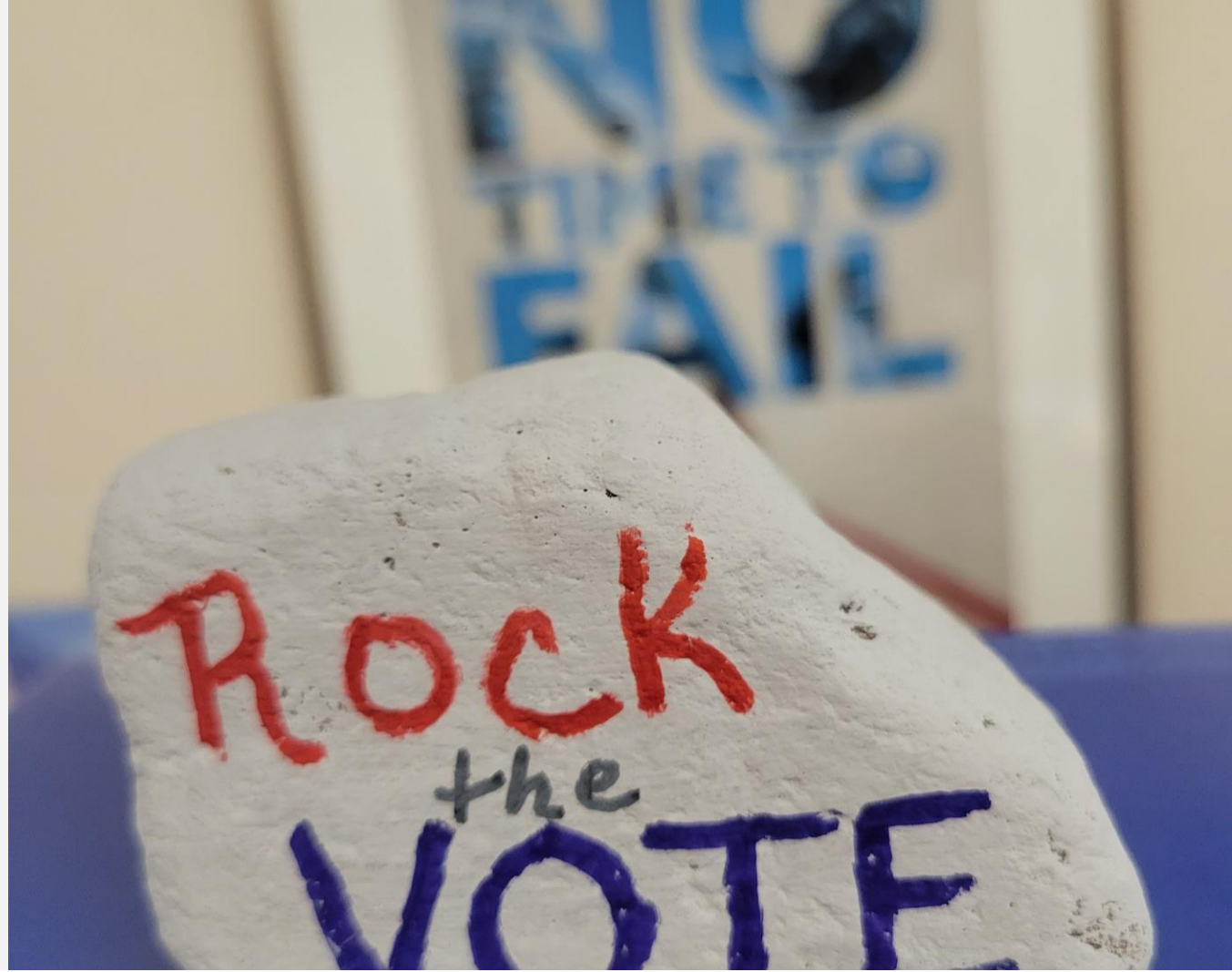


SAVE Act prospects for enaction into law

- The President's Executive Order already attempts to bypass Congress by implementing various aspects of the SAVE Act into law, or attached to federal funding for elections
- The House of Representatives voted on April 10 to pass the SAVE Act, 220-208, with 4 Democrats joining 216 Republicans in favor of the bill
- The bill faces a tougher road in the Senate, where it is subject to a filibuster, however, it could be attached to the FY26 appropriations bill
- The President has publicly promised to issue additional Executive Orders related to elections, which could be used to attempt to direct implementation of more SAVE Act provisions if the Senate chooses not to pass it
- Both the SAVE Act and any Executive Orders would be subject to extensive litigation, likely making their way to the U.S. Supreme Court, creating deep uncertainty about timelines, implementation, etc.



Changes to Federal Support for Election Security



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

There are real, persistent, frightening threats to the security of our elections

- In Cranston, we've had a rock smash our office window, and a note insinuating "sabotage" placed on our mail ballot drop box
- The state BOE in Cranston, last fall, received an envelope with white powder from the "U.S. Traitor Elimination Army"
- Election offices around the country have been sent envelopes containing white powder laced with deadly fentanyl
- The RI Secretary of State was targeted by swatting attacks at his home last fall, as have numerous other officials around the country
- On the West Coast last fall, incendiary devices were placed and detonated on several mail ballot drop boxes
- Nationally, scores of local and state election officials have faced death threats against themselves and their families, or targeted violence of their offices
- AI generated calls and social media posts have been generated to provide voters false election information
- Bomb threats were sent to hundreds of polling locations around the country in November 2024, likely originating from Russia state cyber actors in an attempt to disrupt voting and frighten voters
- Russia, China, and Iran have persistently tried, without success, to hack into voter systems and databases, in addition to phishing emails, disinformation campaigns, and cyber attacks



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers



*Nick Lima – Cranston Canvassing Authority
April 28, 2025*

Near total loss of all established federal support for elections security

In 2017, elections were designated by the Dept. of Homeland Security as **National Critical Infrastructure**, receiving the same support as critical public services, power grid, nuclear plants, water systems, etc.

- In February 2025, the U.S. Attorney General disbanded the FBI task force, which has existed since 2017, that aided us in fighting against foreign interference and disinformation in our elections
- CISA, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, has fired or placed on leave hundreds of personnel, including nearly everyone who had any expertise in election security and election threat intelligence
- CISA terminated all funding and support for the EI-ISAC, an elections infrastructure and security information sharing center that provided us daily updates, intelligence, training, support, and other resources for the last 6 years. Thousands of local election offices, including all 39 RI cities and towns, the BOE, and the RI SOS, were active EI-ISAC members
- CISA is also cutting most funding and support for the larger MS-ISAC, a cybersecurity threat information sharing center that has existed for decades and whose resources are used by nearly all local, county, and state governments in the United States
- CISA eliminated the Election Security Advisor positions that helped us mitigate the many security threats we faced in the 2024 elections just last year, among other staff and program cuts to election security support
- Mr. Lima holds a classified Secret-level security clearance through DHS, and along with senior election officials around the country, has received numerous national security briefings on the serious threats against our elections. It is unclear – and unlikely – that this critical intelligence sharing about the threats to our elections infrastructure will continue going forward



Bipartisan reactions to cuts in federal election security support

- “I have seen firsthand how CISA’s work has helped prevent and address security incidents, and I worry about the serious consequences of removing this support for our local elections officials without an adequate substitute.” – *Pennsylvania Secretary of State Al Schmidt (R)*
- “Disappointed is not the right word, and I haven’t figured out what it is yet. This is leaving an unfillable vulnerability for the conduct of elections in the US.[...]The majority of elections offices are small and have less than 5 or maybe 10 total staff. Even those large sophisticated operations are NOT going to be able to replicate what was/is possible on a national scale.” – *Florida Supervisor of Elections for Marion County Wesley Wilcox (R)*
- Nationwide, the EI-ISAC “saw a 158% increase in the number of cyberthreats reported by members from 2023 to 2024... What made EI-ISAC special was that collaboration of election officials directly with each other all across the nation. We’ve lost information sharing among election officials nationwide.” – *Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows (D)*
- “The biggest issue I have right now is the abject lack of communication from the administration. If they’re just going to wholly eviscerate these services, that’s highly problematic... The very existence of these task forces and agencies is, in itself, a deterrent. If they’re gone, we’re going to have a lot more problems.” – *Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes (D)*
- The bipartisan Cranston Board of Canvassers voted unanimously, 3-0, at its meeting on March 19, 2025 to publicly express the Board’s grave concerns over federal cuts to election security, particularly the loss of CISA intelligence and support, and the defunding of the EI-ISAC



What's next for election security, without federal support?

- Our city IT Department will have to rely more on paid city vendors to provide some of the services CISA and EI-ISAC were providing us for free
- Some services were duplicated by our vendors already – but in cybersecurity, duplication is a layered, defense in-depth strategy, which acts as a deterrent and fail-safe against cyber attacks. Loss of CISA and ISAC support and services will make the city more vulnerable
- Election offices will have to rely more heavily on local and state law enforcement for security support and threat intelligence
- No state or local agency is equipped to effectively fight off, or gather intelligence on, the state-sponsored cyber and advanced persistent threat actors like Russia, China, and Iran. The pullback of CISA, FBI, DNI, NSA, and other federal support puts our office, staff, and the city directly on the front line of international cyber conflicts with these countries, without the significant federal guidance and assistance we have relied upon since 2018
- The Cranston Board of Canvassers will hold a table-top exercise in June 2025 with Cranston Police, Fire, IT, and other stakeholders to explore various election security scenarios and test our responses without having key federal intelligence
- Bipartisan state and local election officials throughout the country are pleading with DHS, CISA, and the administration to restore these programs and funding cuts – but have gone unanswered



Resources used for compiling information used in this presentation:

- Executive Order of President Donald J. Trump, March 25, 2025: **“PRESERVING AND PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF AMERICAN ELECTIONS”** <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/preserving-and-protecting-the-integrity-of-american-elections/>
- National Conference of State Legislatures article: March 27, 2025, **“9 Things to Know About the Proposed SAVE Act”** <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/9-things-to-know-about-the-proposed-save-act>
- Voting Rights Lab article, March 24, 2025: **“Federal Cuts to Election Security Programs Will Make Our Elections Less Secure”** <https://votingrightslab.org/2025/03/24/federal-cuts-to-election-security-programs-will-make-our-elections-less-secure/>
- Brennan Center article, April 1, 2025: **“The President’s Executive Order on Elections, Explained”** <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/presidents-executive-order-elections-explained>
- Verified Voting article, April 9, 2025: **“Understanding the election tech implications in the Trump Administration’s executive order”** <https://verifiedvoting.org/blog-executive-order-apr-2025/>
- Votebeat article, April 7, 2025: **“Challenges to Trump’s order on elections rest on a simple premise: the Constitution”** <https://www.votebeat.org/2025/04/07/lawsuits-challenge-trump-executive-order-on-election-regulation-us-constitution/>
- CNN article, April 9, 2025: **“Trump is dismantling election security networks. State officials are alarmed”** <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/09/politics/election-security-systems-trump-invs/index.html>





Cranston Canvassing Authority

Update to the City Council on Federal Election Changes

Nick Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections
Cranston Canvassing Authority

Contact:
401-780-3128
nlima@cranstonri.gov

April 28, 2025



City of Cranston Board of Canvassers

