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10 Steps State Legislators Can Take to Improve Election Security

By Danielle Root, Liz Kennedy, Michael Sozan, and Jerry Parshall   March 14, 2018

Legislative solutions

1.   Sponsor and/or support election security legislation in your state. In doing so, consult with election security experts who can advise legislative offices and assess proposed legislation. Legislation should focus on requiring statewide paper ballot voting systems, strong postelection audits, replacing outdated election infrastructure, and requiring cybersecurity training for election officials.[1]

2.   Include election security funding in your state budget. Funding can come in the form of a lump sum or grants and should be focused on updating election infrastructure and ensuring elections are carried out using paper ballots statewide; improving postelection audit practices; and strengthening cybersecurity training and protections for voter registration systems.

3.   Hold legislative hearings on vulnerabilities and threats to election infrastructure as well as the importance of election security reforms.[2] Invite state and local election officials, as well as election security experts, to testify.

4.   Give floor speeches in your legislative chamber on the importance of election security solutions.

5.   Sponsor nonbinding resolutions recognizing the threats posed by foreign nation-states seeking to infiltrate and disrupt U.S. elections and the need for improvements in election security preparedness.

Use your role as a legislator to engage with election officials

6.   Meet with state and local election officials. Ask them what support they need in administering elections and about any potential problems they have observed or expect for upcoming elections, in order to tailor legislation to fit specific needs. Meetings should also be held with election security experts who can provide expertise on best practices.

7.   Partner with other legislators to send letters to the office of the top election official in your state. Ask what specific steps are being taken to fortify election security and prepare for potential attacks during the 2018 midterm elections, which the nation's top intelligence officials have warned are all but guaranteed. Private briefings on these matters can also be arranged.

Educate the public and advocate for improving election security preparedness

8. Use communications channels to influence coverage of the issue. For example, write op-eds and letters to the editor supporting election security reforms in your state, such as paper ballot voting systems and strong postelection audits. In doing so, you could remind the public that, in the face of threats to the United States' democratic society, it is even more important that your constituents participate in elections and maintain confidence in the overall integrity of the system.

9. Partner with other legislators to release joint statements on the election security needs and vulnerabilities in your states, in order to apply pressure on governors to enact policy and dedicate necessary funds for the purposes of improving election security preparedness.

10. Advocate to Congress for funding and resources to fortify your state's election infrastructure.[3] Apply pressure to members of Congress representing your state by providing details of how federal funding would benefit your state specifically.

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Endnotes

1 Danielle Root and others, "Election Security in All 50 States: Defending America's Elections" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/02/12/446336/election-security-50-states/.

2 Danielle Root and Liz Kennedy, "9 Solutions to Secure America's Elections" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/08/16/437390/9-solutions-secure-americas-elections/.

3 Michael Sozan, "On HAVA's 15th Anniversary, Congress Needs to Make U.S. Elections More Secure" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/10/26/441417/on-havas-15th-anniversary-congress-needs-to-make-u-s-elections-more-secure/.