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Testimony from:  
Ryan Williamson, Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

**In SUPPORT of SB 224, “A BILL FOR AN ACT . . . concerning elections.”**

January 30, 2023

Senate Elections Committee

Chair Ford and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Ryan Williamson, and I conduct research on elections for the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government across a variety of policy areas, including election security. This is why Senate Bill 224 is important to us.

When it comes to election security, state legislatures should be focused on protecting the public servants who make our elections possible. Senate Bill 224 represents an important step in this direction by providing election workers the same protections afforded to voters and candidates when faced with threats of violence and coercion.

Election workers are preparing to leave in droves.<sup>1</sup> The workers feel they are under attack and are not receiving the necessary support from policymakers. Many around the country have even received death threats for simply doing their jobs.<sup>2</sup> High-ranking, experienced administrators are leaving the profession because of the threatening environment. For example, former Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson retired following the tumultuous 2020 election.<sup>3</sup> This trend is not subsiding either. As recently as Jan. 24, 2023, the elections director in Cochise County, Arizona, announced she would resign after years of harassment and threats.<sup>4</sup> And in many states, including Indiana, counties are finding it unusually difficult to find enough election workers.<sup>5</sup>

Losing experienced, hard-working public servants represents a tremendous loss to the field of election administration. When these election workers leave, they take years of institutional knowledge and expertise that is invaluable to the conduct of elections. It also makes recruiting and retaining new election workers even more difficult. Senate Bill 224 takes an important step toward protecting election workers by deterring threats, coercion and violence against these important administrators. This bill will have the additional benefit of making it easier to retain and recruit new and additional election workers, which will help maintain the integrity of our elections.



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Elections are the bedrock of our democratic system of government, and the workers that make those elections free, fair and secure deserve to be protected. As a result, we urge the committee to support Senate Bill 224.

Thank you for your time,

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<sup>1</sup> Miles Parks, “1 in 5 election officials say they’re likely to quit before 2024,” National Public Radio, March 10, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/10/1085425464/1-in-5-local-election-officials-say-theyre-likely-to-quit-before-2024>.

<sup>2</sup> Chelsey Cox, “‘We’re going to hang you’: DOJ cracks down on threats to election workers ahead of high-stakes midterms,” CNBC, Nov. 2, 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/27/were-going-to-hang-you-doj-cracks-down-on-threats-to-election-workers-ahead-of-high-stakes-midterms.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Kaitlin Lange, “2020 took a toll on me’: Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson to resign,” *The Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 15, 2021. <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/politics/2021/02/15/indiana-secretary-state-connie-lawson-resign/4488316001>.

<sup>4</sup> Jen Fifield, “Cochise County elections director resigns after protecting midterm ballots from Republican officials,” *Votebeat*, Jan. 25, 2023. <https://arizona.votebeat.org/2023/1/25/23571731/cochise-county-lisa-marra-resignation-election-security>.

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Smith, “Early voting in primaries winding down; poll workers needed for Election Day Tuesday,” *The Herald-Times*, April 29, 2022. <https://www.heraldtimesonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2022/04/28/poll-workers-needed-indiana-primary-2022-early-voting-ending/9568017002>.