BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE

Michigan

Top 5 Actions to Strengthen Election Security

American elections face an evolving landscape of security threats, from bomb threats and physical attacks on election infrastructure to cyberattacks and harassment of election workers. The 2024 election cycle saw hundreds of security incidents targeting polling locations, election offices, and ballot drop boxes, with many threats appearing to originate from foreign adversaries.

While coordinated state and local responses demonstrated effective ways to prevent and mitigate these threats, the federal government has significantly reduced its support for election security, undermining its role as a hub for coordination and communication. The Trump administration has frozen key cybersecurity programs, cut personnel, ended funding for information-sharing networks, and sought access to sensitive election systems and data.

With 60 percent of local election officials expressing concern about these federal cuts and 87 percent calling for additional state and local support,[1] it is critical for states to take the lead in protecting election security and safeguarding American democracy.

Recommendations:

1. **The Secretary of State should issue regulations and guidance on access to voting systems and election materials.** Current state law prohibits damaging or destroying a voting system, or obtaining undue possession of a voting system. MCL § 168.932. The secretary should build on these protections by issuing regulations that:
    - Clarify the meaning of undue possession by including a specific list of individuals with authority to access voting systems.
    - Require local election officials to notify the state election office whenever any third party (anyone not listed in statute) requests access to voting systems, regardless of whether there is evidence of a breach.
2. **The Governor should direct state agency leaders to identify opportunities for election security support and form an election security working group with the Secretary of State's office to deliver support to local officials.** As the federal government cuts or deprioritizes support for cyber and physical security assessments, trainings, and incident response support, Michigan should explore how to replace this support and expertise at the state level.

    The governor should:

[1] Brennan Center for Justice, Local Election Officials Survey — July 2025, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-july-2025.

- Direct leaders of relevant state agencies, including state IT, emergency management, homeland security, and law enforcement agencies, to assess internal resources and capacity available to assist election officials.
- Form an election security working group, bringing together state agency leaders with the secretary of state's office to deliver support to local election officials and provide incident response support.

3. **State officials should provide funding for key election cybersecurity tools and services.** The state legislature should work with the secretary of state to assess local offices' cyber capacity following cuts to federally-funded services (through EI-ISAC and MS-ISAC) and provide funding to ensure that election officials continue to have access to critical cybersecurity tools. Essential cybersecurity services for every jurisdiction, including protective DNS, phishing campaign assessments, multifactor authentication, endpoint detection and response, and vulnerability scanning and management, could cost around $5,000 - $25,000 per jurisdiction on average, through statewide contracts may be able to negotiate lower costs.

   State officials could also dedicate remaining and future Help America Vote Act Election Security funds and State and Local Cybersecurity Grant funds for this purpose.

4. **The Attorney General should educate election officials and law enforcement on laws governing threats to election workers and interference with election systems and processes.** The attorney general and other state law enforcement officials should:
   - Reach out to and educate law enforcement officers on election law and administration, since most officers have limited familiarity with these areas due to infrequent high-turnout elections and rare incidents.
   - Distribute reference guides that summarize relevant elections penal provisions, including prohibitions on voter intimidation, interference, and equipment tampering.
   - Work with the secretary of state to ensure county election officials understand their requirements under federal and state law to protect election systems and voter data.

5. **Local election officials should collaborate with other local government entities and practice incident response plans.** County and municipal clerks should form local election security working groups with representatives from local law enforcement, emergency management, legal, public communications, and other key entities. The working group should share resources and information, and develop and practice joint incident response plans ahead of each election.

For more recommendations to secure elections, see the Brennan Center's recent report: A State Agenda for Election Security and Resiliency