



Madison County election authorities attend cybersecurity conference

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MADISON COUNTY - As daily reports of computer hacking, breaches of electronic information, and the possibilities of computerized interference with the election process make their way into the news, Madison County Clerk Debra Ming-Mendoza is brushing up on the latest information on cyber security and safeguarding the cornerstone of democracy – a free and fair election process.

“Regardless of your party affiliation or where any voter’s philosophy lies in the political spectrum, I have an obligation as the county’s election authority to assure that the votes and election process of my citizens are safe from cyber attackers”, said Ming-Mendoza.

To that end, Ming-Mendoza had Madison County’s principal election staff from the Clerk’s Office present for a conference conducted last week by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for the latest information on digital security and meeting the cyber threat. Hosted by the Illinois Association of County Clerks and Records, the two day briefing brought together top experts in digital security from federal and state agencies that identified the challenges faced by election officials at all levels of government and the resources available to assess and electronically safeguard the democratic process.

“This is important in order to build the resilience of the process, working from the county to the state to the federal level to ensure that we are able to protect the systems but also detect and recover from any incidents that we have,” said Matt Masterson, senior cybersecurity adviser for DHS. Federal officials have said that the ultimate goal of election hackers is to erode confidence in democracy. “When the goal is to undermine faith in the process, everyone is a target,” Masterson said.

With cyber threats against government systems escalating in recent years, county clerks and other local election authorities have sought to tap state and federal resources to boost security in all their systems. “A good number of my counterparts from throughout

the state were present, so we can all speak and plan from a common frame of reference on the matter”, Ming-Mendoza stated, adding that she looks forward to bringing as much talent as possible to the planning and implementation process of enhanced security measures. The conference, attended by representatives of 67 of the state’s 108 local election authorities, also featured presentations by the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology and Illinois State Police outlining resources available to local officials for assessing and enhancing local election systems.

This year, Illinois received \$13.2 million in federal funds for improving election security. Most of those funds will be used to create a Cyber Navigator Program that will establish a network of cyber security experts who will work with local authorities to enact enhanced security measures. While the County Clerk’s Office has rigorous election security controls in place, including paper vote records, embedded auditing, managed access control, and isolated sensitive data, the Cyber Navigator program will enhance their cybersecurity posture. Protecting the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of election information remains top priority for the Madison County Clerk’s Office. “Participation in the Cyber Navigation Program will allow us to better understand and prioritize risks, implement best practices, identify threats, detect attacks and recover from cybersecurity incidents. All available local, state, and federal resources will be leveraged to safeguard the integrity of Election Day,” said Ming-Mendoza, Madison County Clerk

“The entire election voting and election process can be thought of as a chain from the local authority here at the county level, to the state level, and then onward to the federal level and any chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The Madison County Clerk’s Office and election process will not be that weak link”, Ming-Mendoza concluded.