



CLAY COUNTY AUDITOR

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Dear Legislators,

As a County Auditor I am quite concerned about many of the provisions of Senate Study Bill 1199 and House Study Bill 213. The bill makes significant changes in the conduct of elections, which Auditors across the state think currently run very smoothly in Iowa.

Auditors and their staff conducted a very successful 2020 General Election during a world-wide pandemic. Voter turnout was record breaking in Iowa and nationally. I am not sure why current rules need to be changed. The proposed elements of the bill are not enhancements to either the voter or auditor's office.

Have any of the Senate Study or House Study members contacted any Auditors about these changes to ask them how these changes will affect their office procedures? Or ask what can we do to make voting better for the public? Auditors are the people who make election rules happen.

I would like to highlight some of the elements of the bill that cause particular concern to myself and fellow Auditors:

- The bill gives the Secretary of State broad authority, not subject to the normal rulemaking process, to control local elections. This potentially restricts county auditors from making important local decisions for the fair and efficient conduct of elections that may not be contemplated at the state level, which conflicts with the home rule authority afforded counties in the Iowa Constitution.
- The bill specifically removes home rule powers from county auditors regarding elections, a constitutionally protected authority.
- The bill makes failure to perform any election duty in Code Chapters 39 through 53 a crime punishable by fine and/or imprisonment. An inadvertent omission could create severe consequences in the lives of not only county auditors, but precinct election officials as well. This would be a strong deterrent to qualified people interested in this area of public service.
- The bill cuts the number of days for casting absentee ballots from 29 days before the election to 18 days. Besides being less convenient to voters, it concentrates the absentee voting process for county auditors in a way that requires the use of more staff and/or overtime, and makes staff more prone to errors. I am baffled as to why any elected person would want the time for voters to cast a vote for them to be limited to only 18 days. Past legislators have tried to give voter's more time to cast a ballot and make the voting process easier.
- The bill denies county auditors the authority to send absentee ballot applications to voters. This currently is a local decision that can aid auditors in planning the flow of absentee ballots. It reduces the amount of additional staff and/or overtime needed, making staff less prone to errors.

- The bill restricts anyone but a householder or immediate relative of a voter from returning an absentee ballot. This potentially jeopardizes voters from returning ballots in a timely fashion, and unnecessarily so, since there has been no serious indication of the abuse of this option.

- The bill disallows auditors from establishing satellite voting locations. County auditors know what locations and times work best. In many counties, voters are used to satellite locations being in certain places. The use of satellite voting reduces the number of voters at the polls on election day, helping to eliminate lines and delays. Leaving the establishment of satellites to the public only creates unknowns in cost and staffing that would potentially disrupt the careful planning of county auditors.

- The bill restricts the use of ballot drop boxes in several detrimental ways. Limiting the number to one per county disallows auditors from having both a drive-up and a walk-up drop box on courthouse property. Restricting the use of the box to ballots only is a hardship for small counties that have multiple use drop boxes. Requiring the emptying of the box four times a day is another hardship to small counties with small staffs, especially when they are busy with elections.

Iowa has a deserved reputation for fair, efficient and smooth elections. Most of these provisions would threaten rather than help that reputation. I ask that you please oppose SSB 1199 and HSB 213.

Thank you for your time.



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