

Missoula County Commissioners

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BCC 2021-080
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Dear Secretary Jacobsen,

Recent allegations have called into question the integrity of Missoula County's elections. We are writing to confirm the Missoula County Elections Office follows procedures and guidance your office issues and approves, and to express our concern that these baseless claims are needlessly eroding voters' faith in local elections.

When the Missoula County Elections Office receives mail ballots leading up to an election, staff begin a multi-step procedure to confirm the voter to whom a ballot was issued is the person who voted it. This includes verifying that the signature on the affirmation envelope matches the signature on file and contacting the voter if it does not. It also includes scanning the unique barcode on each affirmation envelope into the Secretary of State's voter database, and then comparing those envelopes to a report generated by that database to verify each envelope listed as "accepted" is also physically present.

As your office can confirm, these are just two of several steps elections staff around the state take to accurately account for affirmation envelopes received and to accurately tabulate the ballots they contain.

Conversely, a recent public records review of voter affirmation envelopes failed to implement any sort of process to verify their number. Instead, reviewers chose to hand-count affirmation envelopes a single time, without any sort of double-check process in place to confirm the accuracy of their count. This process misses many of the steps your office requires to ensure accuracy. While provided the information about such lists, that step was not taken. An additional verification step that could have been taken would be to contact each voter to confirm they submitted a ballot. This is time-intensive research but would have ensured a more accurate finding than a single hand count.

Missoula County, like every county around the state, takes its responsibility to conduct fair, free and accurate elections very seriously. The accusations in Rep. Tschida's letter to your office are spurious and rely on an unverified error-riddled single review. They are an insult to the Missoula County election judges who conducted the election, an insult to your office — which certified the November election — and an insult to the voters of Missoula County. They do nothing more than insert partisan rhetoric built on disproved claims from other states. Montana has a process for a candidate or party to challenge election results in a court of law. This effort does not rise to that level and should be called out for what it is: political theater. If the Secretary of State's Office determines these claims have merit and that a single hand-count of affirmation envelopes is more reliable than your own procedures to certify elections, that should seriously concern voters not only in Missoula County, but across Montana.

This haphazard review has also been deliberately mischaracterized as a "recount" or "audit." Both of those terms are defined in statute and should not be used to deceive the public about what took place, and we are concerned Rep. Tschida is using this misleading characterization as an excuse to push voter suppression legislation that would rob segments of the population of their right to vote.

If those making these claims sincerely believe them to be true, we ask that you advise them to bring the allegations to a court of law — where they can state their case under oath, rather than bringing them to the Legislature, where neither your office nor ours will be able to present facts, rather than opinion, to a neutral party. In the legislature witnesses are not under oath and can spread disinformation with no repercussions. We strongly encourage you to join Missoula County and welcome the opportunity to prove, under oath, that this election was free, fair and accurate.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



David Strohmaier, Chair



Josh Slotnick, Commissioner



Juanita Vero, Commissioner

BCC/ac