

Secretary Benson continues post-election audit pilot

September audits will verify Aug. 6 election results for Washtenaw ISD, Marquette County

The Secretary of State's Bureau of Elections once again is partnering with local election officials and national experts to perform risk-limiting audits, this time to verify the results of Aug. 6 local elections.

"As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure election security, we're continuing our risk-limiting audits pilot," Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson said. "We continue to learn from each of these audits, which remain a priority for our recently formed Election Security Advisory Commission. We are resolutely focused on making sure your election results are accurate so you can have confidence in the security of your vote."

The Bureau of Elections will work with staff of Voting Works and the Brennan Center for Justice, as well as the following county clerks: Jackson – Amanda Kirkpatrick; Livingston – Elizabeth Hundley; Marquette – Linda Talsma; Monroe – Sharon Lemasters; Washtenaw – Lawrence Kestenbaum; and Wayne – Cathy Garrett.

The audits are open to the public at the following locations:

- 9 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 5 – Washtenaw Intermediate School District (includes Jackson, Livingston, Monroe, Washtenaw and Wayne counties) – Washtenaw Intermediate School District Vogel Rooms A & B, 1819 S. Wagner Road, Ann Arbor
- 5:15 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 10 – Marquette County – Marquette Township Hall, 1000 Commerce Drive.

Michigan's election system already incorporates many important recommendations of national security and cybersecurity experts, including the use of paper ballots, mandatory pre-election testing on voting equipment and performance-based audits to verify completion of election tasks.

Risk-limiting audits have emerged nationally as the preeminent method for confirming election results. They use statistical methods to perform a comprehensive check on the accuracy of reported election results and to detect anomalies, possibly tied to human error or manipulation. Using a mathematical formula, auditors in each locality will randomly select ballots to confirm that the ballot tabulators correctly tallied election results.

The method first was implemented by the state of Colorado, where elections are run at the county level and the vast majority of voting occurs by mail. Michigan is exploring ways to adapt these audits to its own highly decentralized elections structure, in which 1,520 city and township clerks administer both in-person and by-mail voting in more than 4,800 individual precincts, with county clerks also playing a role in canvassing election results.

Michigan began working last year with national experts to study and define risk-limiting audit methodology for states with individual precincts. Michigan first conducted pilot audits after the November 2018 midterm election in the cities of Kalamazoo, Lansing and Rochester Hills. Further pilots were conducted after the May 2019 election in Muskegon County, Lansing Public School District jurisdictions and the city of Wyandotte.

The goal of these expanded pilots is to continue development of an overall audit model for Michigan that will work for local elections, as well as a full statewide audit of election results.