

From the desk of Shannon Wragge, Pierce County Clerk/Election Commissioner

Pierce Clerk's Office is dedicated to accurate, secure elections

There is a lot of information floating around on social media about the integrity of elections. Since the May 14th Primary Election is around the corner, I wanted to share more insight into election procedures in Pierce County.

Pierce County, like every other county in Nebraska, operates its own elections. Our duties include handling our county's voter registration list, operating precincts on Election Day, operating and testing election equipment and completing other election-related requirements. My office and the poll workers, are the ones responsible for conducting accurate and secure elections. It is our utmost priority.

At the state level, the Secretary of State's Office ensures elections are operated according to state and federal law. Their office provides us with help to make sure we have secure and accurate elections.

An Omaha company, Election Systems and Software (ES & S), supplies our ballot-counting machines – also known as tabulators – that securely and accurately count ballots. The tabulators do not have modems and cannot be connected to the internet. The tabulators went through rigorous testing to be certified by an independent testing laboratory prior to being certified by the Election Assistance Commission and subsequently by the Secretary of State. Election Systems and Software provides testing for the accuracy of their tabulators, and the Pierce County Clerk's Office does its own independent testing before each election, as required by law.

Early voting is a secure process that is required by law to ensure a Nebraska voter has an opportunity to cast their ballot. In Pierce County, a voter who wants to vote early must complete the early voting application process. The only voters who receive early voting ballots are the voters who successfully complete the early voting application process. We do not randomly send ballots out to voters or non-voters.

As the early voting ballots are received, staff members compare the addresses and signatures on the ballot envelopes. We verify that the right person voted the ballot and that no other ballot was returned for this voter before they are opened and counted. If there is a discrepancy, the Clerk's Office will work with the voter to correct any issue.

On election day, ballots are delivered to the polling places. The blank ballots are counted by staff in the Clerk's Office before sent out. At the end of the day, the poll workers also complete a ballot reconciliation report. This report consists of the number of voters, unused ballots and the spoiled ballots.

Once the ballots are received back from the polling places and are counted, election officials compare the number of signatures in the poll books to the number of ballots shown as counted on the tabulator reports. Results are then transferred through one-way one-use portable media, or by printouts, to an internet-connected computer to be sent through a secure website to the Secretary of State's Office to be added to the statewide totals.

Our office, along with every other county election office in Nebraska, conducts checks and balances after the election. One of the routine checks and balances includes having bipartisan teams hand count ballots for three contests and compare to what was counted by the tabulators in a percentage of precincts randomly selected statewide by the Secretary of State. We want to make sure the tabulators functioned as expected.

Conducting an election is a team effort between Federal, State, County and local citizens. Pierce County has always been fortunate to have local dedicated citizens at the polls working hard to ensure safe and secure elections.

I hope this letter will instill voter confidence in the local election process. If you have any questions regarding elections in Pierce County, please feel free to contact our office. We are here to serve you.

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