

A Letter From
 *Secretary of the State*
Denise Merrill

Friends,

The 2020 election will be one of the most consequential, and the most watched, elections of our lifetimes. National meetings of Secretaries of State went from barely mentioning cybersecurity before the Russian government interfered in the 2016 election, to being exclusively about cybersecurity over the past four years. And over the past few months, we have seen another tectonic shift in election administration as COVID-19 has inspired fear of entering polling places and direct person-to-person contact.

One thing that has always been clear to me as your Secretary of the State is that in Connecticut, the voting always must go on. I have worked with my team, my colleagues across the country, and the local election officials in our towns to come up with a plan that protects the integrity of our elections from cyber-attacks, the health of our voters and our poll workers in polling places, and the accessibility of our elections to everyone, despite the fear of a global pandemic.

In Connecticut, no one should be forced to choose between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote, and every valid vote cast should be a voted counted, free from foreign interference in our elections.

This plan will ensure that Connecticut voters will be able to cast their ballots in 2020, their votes will be counted, and they can trust the Connecticut election system.

Thank you,



Denise Merrill
Connecticut Secretary of the State

Overcoming **Adversity**

During the **COVID-19** *Crisis*

Our **CHALLENGE**

The foundation of democracy in America is our elections. The legitimacy of our electoral system is the bedrock upon which a government of the people, by the people, and for the people is accepted and established. That legitimacy depends on public confidence in our election system.

This year, there are forces both foreign and domestic that are placing unprecedented stress and strain on our electoral system.

Authoritarian regimes opposed to American democracy continue to launch cyberattacks against election systems in the United States. These foreign actors possess the capability to significantly disrupt the 2020 election cycle, thus undermining public confidence in the fairness and accuracy of election results. Disinformation campaigns being run by Russia, China, and Iran that are currently attempting to sow division and discord in the American electorate can also be weaponized to spread false information about the election process itself. We can expect these efforts to intensify, in an attempt to undermine public confidence in the election system and by extension in democracy itself.

In addition to this foreign threat to the integrity of our elections, a once in a century pandemic has created an unprecedented strain on election systems across the country. The ranks of election workers, donned in the gear of first responders, are thinned out due to the crisis. Our ability to conduct a general election in a pandemic is untested, and the public is rightfully concerned. Such fear may cause election officials to abandon their posts, and cause voters to stay home (and under current conditions in Connecticut) be denied their right to vote.

The obstacles in front of us are formidable, and the challenge to our democracy is real.

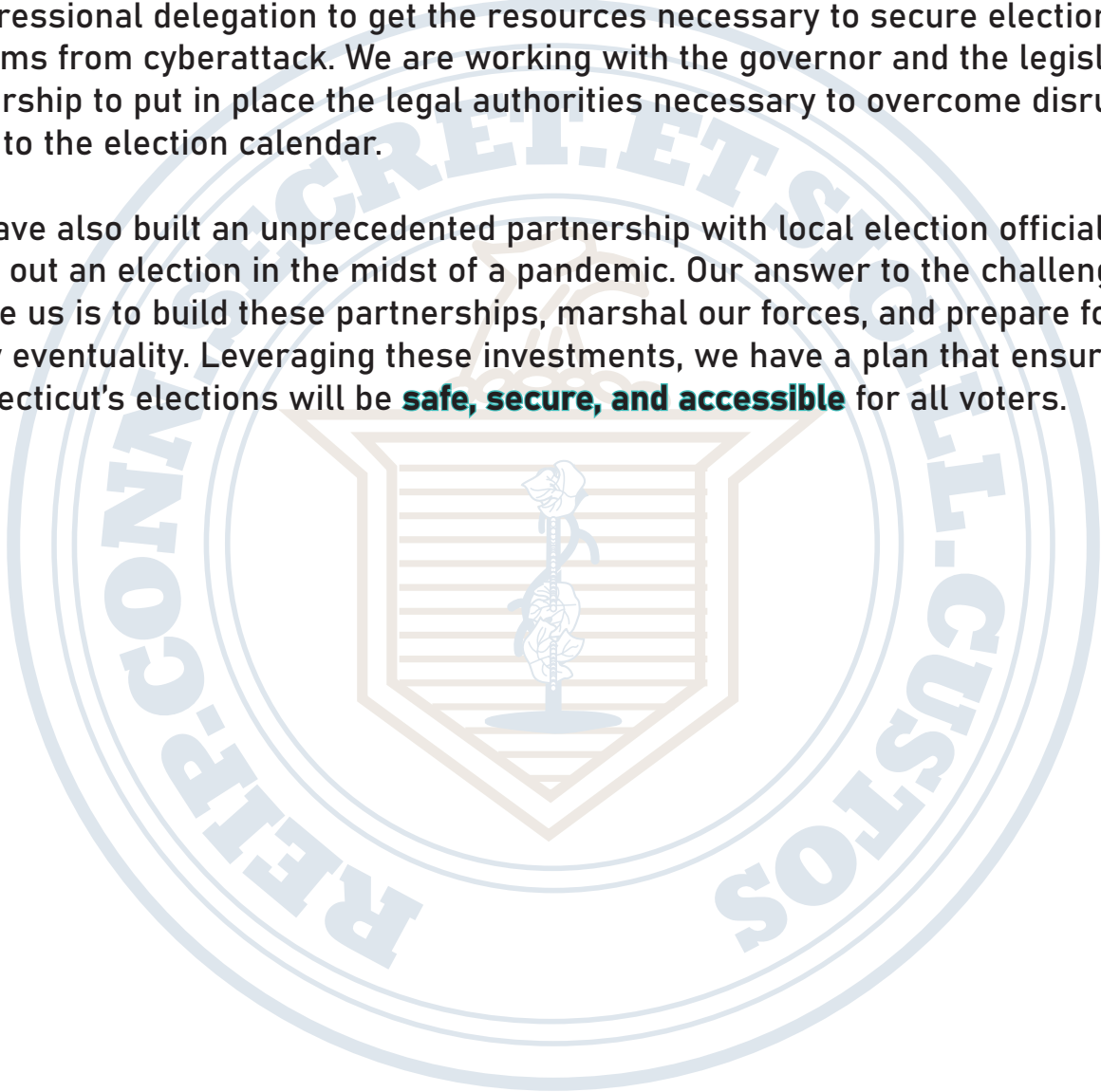
Overcoming Adversity

During the COVID-19 Crisis

Our **ANSWER**

In Connecticut, we are already at work to meet this challenge to our democracy. The Office of the Secretary of the State has been working with Connecticut's Congressional delegation to get the resources necessary to secure election systems from cyberattack. We are working with the governor and the legislative leadership to put in place the legal authorities necessary to overcome disruptions to the election calendar.

We have also built an unprecedented partnership with local election officials to carry out an election in the midst of a pandemic. Our answer to the challenge before us is to build these partnerships, marshal our forces, and prepare for every eventuality. Leveraging these investments, we have a plan that ensures Connecticut's elections will be **safe, secure, and accessible** for all voters.



Elections must be

Safe, Secure, and Accessible

Elections must be
SAFE

(1) The Safe Polls Plan – Working with public health officials, our office will require all municipalities to submit a plan for the primary and general elections in the 2020 election cycle that includes a list of polling locations, staffing levels for each polling location, an identified list of poll workers and moderators ready to work on election day, list of cleaning and safety products required, and an emergency plan. Municipalities which complete their Safe Polls Plan will be eligible for a Safe Polls Grant from the Office of the Secretary of the State.

(2) Safe Polls Grant Program – Municipalities that submit their Safe Polls Plan will be eligible for a Safe Polls Grant which can be applied to meet the costs incurred to conduct an election in a pandemic environment. These expenses, as vetted by public health officials, include cleaning and safety products and additional personnel if necessary.

(3) Safe Polls Awareness – Our office will lead a public information campaign, with public health officials and state and local election officials, to make voters aware of the Safe Polls program. Any voter who chooses to vote in a polling place, should be able to do so knowing that we have taken every action we could to make that polling place as safe as possible.

(4) Poll Worker Recruitment Program – The Secretary of the State will launch a campaign to recruit and train poll workers for the 2020 general election. The campaign will be based on existing models, will leverage the Governor’s efforts to recruit volunteers to respond to the COVID crisis, and will direct potential recruits to municipal election officials.

(5) Cleaning of Polling Locations – There are vendors who can provide cleaning services to polling locations statewide after elections are completed. This would restore each polling place after its use in the election for its usual use by means of a deep cleaning.

Safe Polls Grants will be awarded by the Secretary of the State to participating municipalities. All that is required is a town plan identifying the key safety features of their in-person voting procedures, like the number of polling places, how many poll workers they have available, and the cleaning supplies they anticipate needing.

(6) **Physical Security** – The Department of Homeland Security is providing equipment to be deployed at five high volume polling places in the state to protect the voting location with the use of physical barriers.

(7) **School Closures** – To ensure the security of our students and reduce the risk of virus transmission between voters and students and school employees, all schools will be required to be closed on Election Day.



Elections must be

Safe, Secure, and Accessible

Elections must be
SECURE

- (1) National Guard Cybersecurity Assessment – The Connecticut National Guard, at the direction of the Secretary of the State, will perform a high-level assessment of the cybersecurity posture of each town as it relates to their election infrastructure.
- (2) Town Network Upgrades – Our office has identified approximately 20 municipalities that have chronic issues with their connections to the networks necessary for the election process. We are providing upgrades to town network connections to state-hosted election systems to eliminate unreliable access.
- (3) Replacement Workstations – The offices of local election officials are chronically underfunded and, as a result, many are using outdated hardware and software that make them vulnerable to cyberattacks. Our office will provide 50% matching grants to municipalities that commit to investing in upgrading outdated workstations.
- (4) Virtual Desktop Infrastructure – We have successfully pilot tested a virtual desktop infrastructure which helps secure local elections infrastructure from intrusion. The virtual desktop gives our technicians remote access to local election officials' workstations for the purposes of ongoing security checks and upgrades. We will deploy this system statewide over the course of this election cycle.
- (5) Protecting the Connecticut Voter Registration System – Over the course of the past several months, our office has imposed a complex password and a two-factor authentication requirement to gain access to the CVRS. We will continue to require secure passwords in order for local election officials to access the CVRS.
- (6) Upgrade the Connecticut Voter Registration System – CVRS is the backbone of the election administration system in the State of Connecticut. As Connecticut was one of the first states in the country to implement a statewide central voter registration system, that system is beginning to show its age and needs a comprehensive upgrade to increase efficiency and reduce potential vulnerabilities. We will conduct the necessary planning for this upgrade so that implementation can begin upon the conclusion of the 2020 election cycle.

(7) Security Audit of Vendors – Connecticut’s election system runs on the IT services provided by private vendors such as PCC, LHS, Adkins, and IVS. We will conduct a comprehensive security audit of those firms to ensure that their systems are secure, and they are using best security practices.

(8) Application Development for Secure Systems – We are developing a two-factor authentication system to enhance security for our Election Management System as well. We will also reserve funds to develop applications for the CVRS and the Online Voter Registration System so that we can react to emerging security challenges.

(9) Online Courses for Certification of Registrars of Voters – The University of Connecticut is converting the certification process for Connecticut’s registrars of voters from physical to online courses. A course on cybersecurity is also now included in the certification process. This will streamline the certification process, upgrade skills for local election officials, increase the accessibility of the classes, and clearly identify those registrars who need more help to come up to speed.

(10) Security Awareness Training for Local Election Officials – The Security Mentor system will provide cybersecurity awareness training for all registrars of voters, town clerks, and moderators. This will raise the awareness of Connecticut’s election officials to cybersecurity threats and remind them of best practices in daily operations.

(11) Trainer to Conduct Classes – We will provide ongoing training classes for local election officials instructing them on best practices in the use of online election systems such as EMS and CVRS.

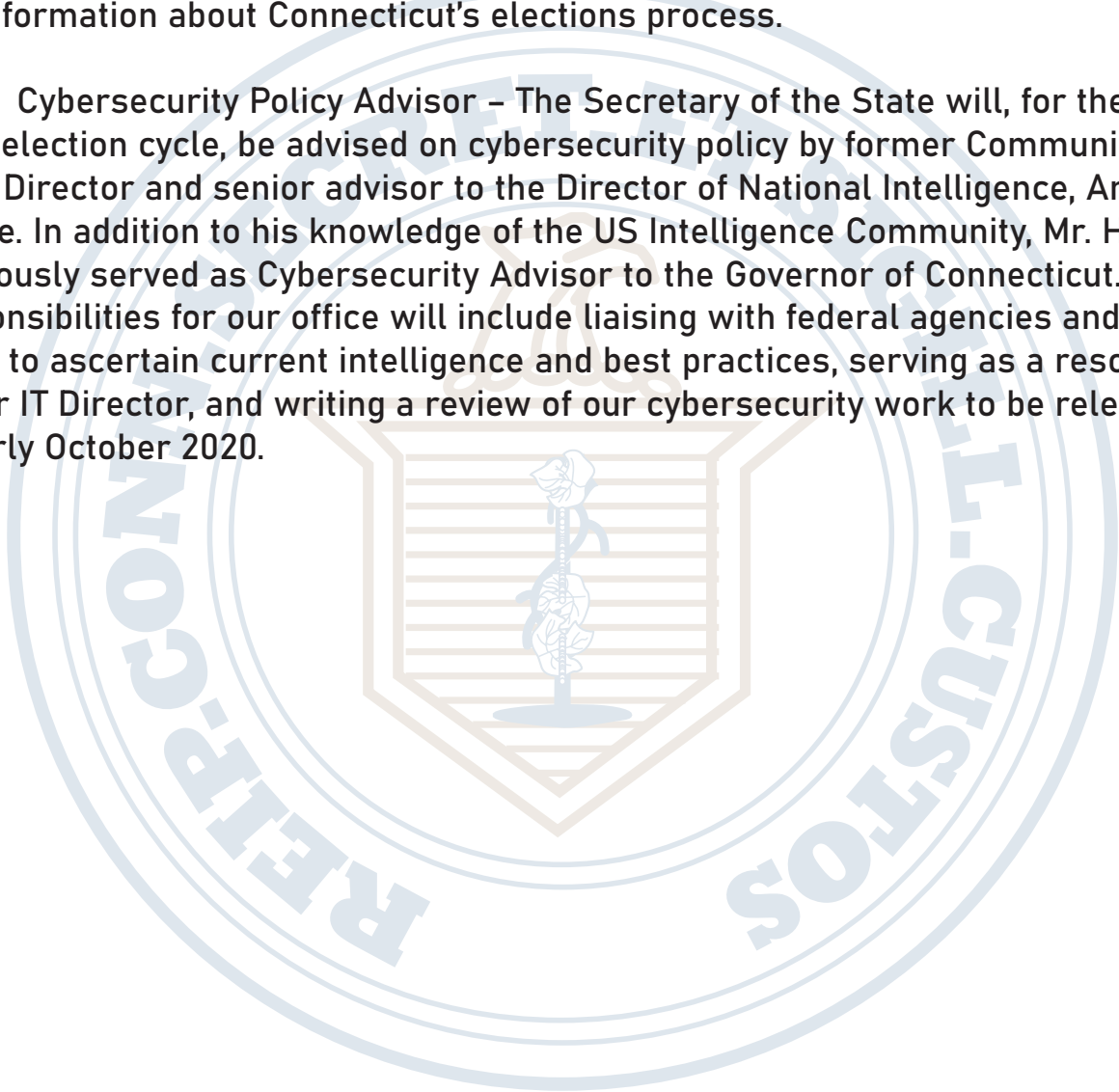
(12) Election Support Officers – To enhance engagement with local election officials and improve accountability within our office, the Elections Division at the Office of the Secretary of the State has recently been reconfigured into five Election Support Teams (one for each Congressional District). Each Election Support Team is made up of an Election Attorney, an Election Officer, and a support staffer. In addition, each Election Support Team will have a part time staffer to be designated “Election Support Officer.” Formerly known as “Regional Election Monitors,” these officers will be hired by and accountable to the Secretary of

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the State for the purposes of serving as field support for local election officials. They will also support the post-election audit process in the field.

(13) **Election Information Security** – Foreign powers have launched disinformation campaigns against the United States designed to sow discord and division amongst the American people. US Intelligence officials see the potential for these campaigns to become weaponized and used to spread disinformation about the election process itself. Our office will hire an Election Information Security Analyst to scan social media and the dark web to identify and counter misinformation about Connecticut’s elections process.

(14) **Cybersecurity Policy Advisor** – The Secretary of the State will, for the 2020 election cycle, be advised on cybersecurity policy by former Communications Director and senior advisor to the Director of National Intelligence, Arthur House. In addition to his knowledge of the US Intelligence Community, Mr. House previously served as Cybersecurity Advisor to the Governor of Connecticut. His responsibilities for our office will include liaising with federal agencies and experts to ascertain current intelligence and best practices, serving as a resource to our IT Director, and writing a review of our cybersecurity work to be released in early October 2020.



Elections must be
Safe, Secure, and Accessible
Elections must be
ACCESSIBLE

The people of Connecticut should not have to choose between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote. The current circumstances of this pandemic make that choice a reality for many of our fellow citizens. The Secretary of the State is taking action to ensure that access to voting is a reality for all voters, no matter what the circumstances.

- (1) Expansion of Absentee Ballot access –
 - a – The Office of the Secretary of the State will provide an absentee ballot application to all eligible voters for the 2020 primary and general elections.
 - b – After processing by their town clerks, those who request absentee ballots will be provided with absentee ballots via a mail house contracted by the Office of the Secretary of the State.
 - c – Secure drop boxes will be provided to every municipality so that absentee ballots may be deposited by voters.
 - d – The Secretary of the State will offer a grant program to meet extra costs for processing and personnel which might be required for the town clerks due to increased demand for absentee ballots.
 - e – Pre-paid postage will be provided so that neither voters nor municipalities have to pay to mail absentee ballots and absentee ballot applications back and forth.
- (2) Public Information Campaign – The Office of the Secretary of State will conduct a public information campaign using social media and traditional outreach to convey information about the absentee ballot option for voting during the pandemic. This campaign will encourage voters to fill out their applications for absentee ballots as early as possible, easing the strain on the offices of town clerks across the state.
- (3) Interactive Voting Systems Hardware Maintenance – We will pay for the maintenance of voting machines used by localities which allow for accommodation for disabled citizens to cast their votes.
- (4) Videos for Interactive Voting Systems, Online Voter Registration – Our office will produce and distribute training videos for those who operate and use the IVS and OLVR systems.

(5) Backup Voting Machines – We have procured 50 backup voting machines which can be used to provide for replacement parts for existing voting machines.

(6) SEEC – We have provided funds to the State Elections Enforcement Commission to upgrade their systems and strengthen their cybersecurity defenses.

No Connecticut voter should ever have to choose between their health and their right to vote. This plan is designed to ensure that Connecticut’s elections will be safe, secure, and accessible to every eligible voter who wants to participate. Connecticut’s elections must go on, so I urge everyone who can to participate. ”

—Secretary of the State Denise Merrill