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Election Security: Federal Funding for Securing Election Systems

Foreign efforts to interfere in the 2016 elections highlighted the potential for threats to the technologies, facilities, and processes used to administer elections. The federal government has responded to such threats, in part, by proposing and providing funding that can be used to help secure election systems.

This In Focus offers an overview of federal funding for election system security. It starts by describing funding Congress and federal agencies have made available since the 2016 elections for securing election technologies, facilities, and processes. It then summarizes legislative proposals to authorize or appropriate further funding.

The In Focus does not cover funding for addressing threats to election workers or the health and safety risks to voters and election officials posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For more on federal funding for those purposes, see CRS Insight IN11831, *Election Worker Safety and Privacy*, by Sarah J. Eckman and Karen L. Shanton; and CRS Report R46646, *Election Administration: Federal Grant Funding for States and Localities*, by Karen L. Shanton.

Federal Funding

States, territories, and localities have primary responsibility for securing elections, but federal agencies also play a role in helping identify and address election system threats and vulnerabilities. Since the 2016 elections, Congress has provided funding that can be used to help secure election systems both to states, territories, and the District of Columbia (DC) and to federal agencies. Agencies have also designated some of the funding they have received for more general purposes for activities related to election system security.

Funding for States, Territories, and DC

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA; P.L. 107-252) established a grant program for making certain general improvements to election administration. Congress has included funding for that grant program in multiple regular and continuing appropriations acts since the 2016 elections: \$380 million, \$425 million, \$75 million, \$75 million, and \$55 million, respectively, in the consolidated appropriations acts for FY2018 (P.L. 115-141), FY2020 (P.L. 116-93), FY2022 (P.L. 117-103), FY2023 (P.L. 117-328), and FY2024 (P.L. 118-47); and \$15 million in the FY2025 full-year continuing appropriations act (P.L. 119-4). All six rounds of funding have been available to the 50 states, DC, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and all but the FY2018 funds were also available to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The appropriations acts made the HAVA funding broadly available for general improvements to the administration of

federal elections, including improvements to election technology and security. Explanatory statements accompanying the FY2018 and FY2020 acts also explicitly listed the following as permissible uses of the funds:

- replacing paperless voting equipment,
- implementing post-election audits,
- addressing cyber vulnerabilities in election systems,
- providing election officials with cybersecurity training,
- instituting election system cybersecurity best practices, and
- making other improvements to the security of federal elections.

Each eligible recipient has been guaranteed a minimum allocation under each of the above appropriations acts, with some entitled to additional funds based on voting-age population (see **Table 1** for the total available to each eligible recipient under all six acts). The 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico have been required to provide a 5% match for the FY2018 funding and a 20% match for the subsequent funds.

All recipients have also been expected to submit plans for use of the funding to the agency charged with administering the funds, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), and to report to the agency on their spending. According to the EAC, as of December 31, 2024, states had reported spending about \$684 million of the almost \$1.06 billion available in federal funding and interest for FY2018 through FY2024.

In addition to the HAVA funding Congress designated specifically for elections activities, some funding has been available for securing election systems under more general-purpose grant programs. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has encouraged recipients of its State and Local Cybersecurity Grants to include election officials on their Cybersecurity Planning Committees, for example, and required FY2023 and FY2024 State Homeland Security Program and Urban Area Security Initiative grantees to allocate a share of their funds to enhancing election security. For more on some of those grant programs, see CRS Report R44669, *Department of Homeland Security Preparedness Grants: A Summary and Issues*, by Shawn Reese.

Funding for Federal Agencies

Various federal agencies play a role in helping secure election systems. The EAC is dedicated to helping improve election administration, for example, and DHS took on new election security responsibilities following its January 2017 designation of election systems as critical infrastructure.

For more on the EAC and the critical infrastructure designation, respectively, see CRS Report R45770, *The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC): Overview and Selected Issues for Congress*, by Karen L. Shanton; and CRS In Focus IF10677, *The Designation of Election Systems as Critical Infrastructure*, by Brian E. Humphreys.

Congress has designated some of the funding it has appropriated for such agencies specifically for helping secure election systems. Report language for the consolidated appropriations measures enacted between FY2018 and FY2023 recommended funding for DHS election security initiatives, for example, and the FY2022 and FY2023 report language encouraged the department's Science and Technology Directorate to consider conducting research on voting technologies and election data security procedures.

Agencies may also choose to spend some of the funding they receive for more general purposes on activities related to election system security. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency provided funding to advance development of a secure, open-source voting system, for example, and the National Science Foundation has awarded grants for voting technology research. DHS opted to continue funding its election security initiatives for FY2024, although it has subsequently paused or discontinued funding for some projects like the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center.

Table 1. Total HAVA General Improvements Grant Funding Allocated to Eligible Recipients Under Recent Consolidated and Continuing Appropriations Acts
(\$, rounded in millions)

AL	16.5	IN	20.0	NV	12.4	TN	20.0
AK	9.3	IA	13.1	NH	9.9	TX	60.2
AZ	19.8	KS	12.6	NJ	25.3	UT	12.0
AR	12.8	KY	15.5	NM	11.1	VT	9.3
CA	88.2	LA	15.8	NY	49.6	VA	23.7
CO	17.1	ME	9.9	NC	27.0	WA	21.0
CT	14.1	MD	18.7	ND	9.3	WV	10.9
DE	9.3	MA	20.8	OH	31.2	WI	18.5
DC	9.3	MI	27.6	OK	14.3	WY	9.3
FL	49.5	MN	17.6	OR	14.7	AS	1.9
GA	26.8	MS	12.8	PA	34.3	CNMI	1.3
HI	9.9	MO	19.1	RI	9.5	GU	1.9
ID	10.1	MT	9.4	SC	16.3	PR	9.2
IL	33.7	NE	10.7	SD	9.3	VI	1.9

Source: CRS, based on data from the EAC.

Note: This table includes allocations from funding provided by the FY2018, FY2020, FY2022, FY2023, and FY2024 consolidated appropriations acts and the FY2025 continuing appropriations act.

Legislative Proposals

Proposals to provide states, territories, and DC with funding they can use to help secure their election systems have been

offered in each appropriations cycle since the 2016 elections. For example, proposed FY2021 appropriations bills and amendments to FY2019 measures would have provided funding under the same provisions of HAVA and the same or similar terms and conditions as the recent consolidated and continuing appropriations acts.

Some Members have also introduced legislation to authorize other election system security spending. For example, in the 118th Congress, the Securing America's Elections Act of 2023 (H.R. 466) would have authorized funding for meeting new voting system requirements and the Sustaining Our Democracy Act (H.R. 5292/S. 630) would have provided for ongoing funding for securing election infrastructure and other elections activities.

Such proposals have taken various approaches to helping secure election systems. Some of the ways they vary are by

- **Type of threat addressed.** Election systems face multiple threats. Bad actors might target technological, physical, or human vulnerabilities in the system, or more than one of the above. Funding proposals introduced since the 2016 elections have aimed to address several types of threat. For example, the Fair, Accurate, Secure, and Timely (FAST) Voting Act of 2019 (H.R. 1512) would have authorized funding that could be used to secure the physical chain of custody of voting machines, among other purposes, and the EAC Reauthorization Act of 2017 (H.R. 794) would have authorized funding for grants to upgrade the technological security of voter registration lists.
- **Timing of response.** Efforts to secure election systems can be aimed at preventing security incidents, detecting them, or recovering from them. Funding has been proposed for interventions at various points. Some of the funding provisions of the Securing America's Federal Elections (SAFE) Act (H.R. 2722/S. 2053 /S. 2238; 116th Congress) were directed at protecting election systems against attacks, for example, while others would have helped officials respond to them.
- **Specificity of uses.** Some of the funding provisions of election security bills have focused on specific activities. Others would have authorized appropriations for more general purposes and delegated responsibility for identifying the best uses of the funds to states or other entities. For example, the Election Security Assistance Act of 2019 (H.R. 3412) would have left decisions about how to use its payments largely to states, territories, and DC. The 115th Congress's Secure Elections Act (H.R. 6663/S. 2261/S. 2593) would have established an election cybersecurity advisory panel, among other provisions, and authorized a grant program for implementing the panel's guidelines.

Among the proposed bills listed above, an FY2021 consolidated appropriations bill (H.R. 7617) and a version of the SAFE Act (H.R. 2722) were passed by the House. None of the other proposals passed either chamber.

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