

COUNTY OF JEFFERSON
BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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To: Jefferson County legislators and County Administrator Robert Hagemann

From: Commissioners LaFave and Seymour

Date: Feb. 1, 2022

Re: 2021 Annual Report to the County Legislature in compliance with NYS Election Law §3-212(4)

When we tell a Jefferson County resident that we work at the Board of Elections, we occasionally find ourselves hearing in return, “Then what do you do for the other 364 days?”

We choose to see that repartee as a compliment.

The eight professionals at the Jefferson County Board of Elections worked in excess of 260 days to ensure the administration of elections went so smoothly that most voters didn’t think of us except once (or twice) a year.

Behind the scenes, however, we rarely stopped moving.

The move of the primary from September to June has elongated the campaign season; candidates are preparing for elections in February instead of May. State legislators have occupied our Januarys as they make election reforms their top post-New Year priority.

New York has chaptered 101 elections-related bills since 2019, and legislators show little sign of fatiguing. Their 2021 priorities were to continued expansion of access to the polls, both through absentee and in-person voting.

The first step, of course, is to register voters.

In January, we sent registration forms to municipal offices and post offices so that residents have easy access to forms. They are also available online to those with New York drivers' licenses through the MyDMV website, and to others through both our VoteJefferson.com and the state Board of Elections site. We are also happy to mail forms upon request.

We also bring registration forms, absentee applications and other pertinent information when we speak to civic groups and school students, which we did with both the local American Association of University Women chapter as well as Jefferson Community College in 2021.

The ongoing pandemic created many challenges, including condensing the designating petition period by two weeks. More than 250 candidates sought local offices last year -- and many had questions about their ever-changing signature requirements, who had filed to run against them and how much money they could collect for their particular race.

We believe that public confidence in elections is highest when boards are transparent, so we have made a concerted effort to update our website regularly to provide answers to about all these questions (and more). We also used our Workplace summer intern to scan historical documents -- including election results from the pre-computer era -- and upload them to our website for public research purposes.

Our board also underwent a few staffing changes last year.

Michelle Coullier, our Democratic deputy, left our office in August to pursue a new career at the county jail. Tamara Gollaher replaced her as deputy, and Denise Towles filled Tammy's former registration clerk position.

Challenges await all of us in 2022.

The state's push to expand early voting will create two sites in Jefferson County, starting this year. We have utilized state grant funds to offset some costs related to opening a second site, while a second grant should aid with capital investments. Our voting machines are now 14 years old and some are acting very much like temperamental teenagers, testing our resolve. We are purchasing four new Dominion ImageCast Evolution machines, which are the "newer model" in New York. This is a prelude to a more involved discussion about purchasing or leasing a new fleet in the not-too-distant future.

We cannot say with certainty what awaits us with state-level redistricting, but we know that the fight for control of New York's legislative chambers and congressional delegation will put all county boards under a microscope. We appreciate the support of several county departments and legislators as we rise to meet each challenge this coming year.