

# Madison Mayor Rhodes-Conway: Proposes stricter penalties for people who threaten/harass election officials and poll workers

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In the aftermath of the 2020 Presidential Election and the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol, many election officials working at both the state and local levels have been subjected to harassment and violent threats. Indeed, recent surveys have shown that election officials feel unsafe at work and have listed harassment by the public as their main reason for leaving their jobs. Unfortunately, our election officials and poll workers right here in Madison have been subjected to the same reprehensible treatment.

To counter this trend, Mayor Rhodes-Conway, Alder Patrick Heck, Council President Keith Furman and Vice President Jael Currie are introducing an ordinance and resolution to strengthen the City's commitment to the safety of election officials and the legitimacy of the election process.

"After the 2020 election and the attack on the U.S. Capitol, election officials in Madison and Dane County and in towns and villages across the state have faced threats and harassment for merely doing their jobs. By introducing these ordinance changes, the entire City of Madison, our police and our prosecutors are standing up and saying 'enough.' We are going to do everything we can to protect our clerks and poll workers from threats of violence and harassment," said Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway.

Election officials continue to face threats of violence ahead of the 2022 midterm elections. For example, a [poll](#) of nearly 600 election workers, conducted by the

Brennan Center for Justice, found that 1 in 6 local election officials have reported experiencing threats because of their job and that nearly 1 in 3 local election officials say they know at least one election worker who left their job at least in part because of fears for their safety due to increased threats or intimidation.

“As a battleground state, Wisconsin is at a constant and elevated risk of threats and intimidation towards election officials. Here in Madison, our Clerk’s office and thousands of dedicated election officials responded to the pandemic with an unprecedented level of work and commitment to keep voters safe and to secure the integrity of the ballot,” said Alder Patrick Heck. “Nonpartisan election officials are the backbone of our democracy and deserve to conduct their work free from harassment and threats.”

Across the country, states and localities are taking action to keep election officials safe. For example, in Oregon, Governor Kate Brown signed a bill into law expanding protections for election administrators against unwanted harassment. Similar bills have been introduced in other state legislatures, such as in Washington, where a proposed bill would add prison time and a hefty fine to anyone who harasses an election official.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced the creation of an Election Threats Task Force “to address the rise in threats against election workers, administrators, officials, and others associated with the electoral process.” The U.S. Attorney General, DOJ officials and the Director of the FBI have met with more than 1,400 election officials to discuss these threats and announced the first indictment and arrest related to the Task Force on January 21, 2022.

Under the proposed changes to Madison ordinances, a conviction of disorderly conduct targeted at an election official will carry a maximum forfeiture of one thousand dollars (\$1000). The increased forfeiture reflects the harm to the election system, in addition to the effect of such behavior on election officials. Each instance of disorderly conduct can be charged as a separate violation. If the conduct is repeated or poses a significant threat, law enforcement has the option to refer the matter to the District Attorney to consider criminal charges.

The proposed changes to MGO Sec. 24.02 create a municipal offense of engaging in disorderly conduct towards election officials. The accompanying resolution also reinforces the Common Council’s commitment to election officials’ safety and its endorsement of Wisconsin’s nonpartisan election administration system.

Read the resolution here:

<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5723017&GUID=CB4DD152-2FA6-47AC-B0AC-8C4D29B8975D&Options=ID|Text|&Search=7261947AC-B0AC-8C4D29B8975D&Options=ID|Text|&Search=72619>

Read the ordinance change here:

<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5723016&GUID=E547A5C3-ABFD-40B5-B17E-EC3560426440&Options=ID|Text|&Search=7261840B5-B17E-EC3560426440&Options=ID|Text|&Search=72618>