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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
Department of the Secretary of State

February 23, 2024

Testifying In Support

L.D. 2214, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

Senators Rotundo and Hickman, Representatives Sachs and Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Shenna Bellows, and I am the Secretary of State. I am here today to present testimony in support of those items presented in the 2024 Supplemental Budget for the Department of the Secretary of State.

There are 5 General Fund initiatives beginning on page **A-128** of the **Budget Document**.

Bureau of Administrative Services and Corporations 0692

1. Provides funding for voter education materials. The All Other request is **\$10,000 in FY 2023-24**.

This initiative is to fund various voter education materials that include the Citizens' Guide, "I Voted" stickers, posters and other materials needed to distribute to clerks to promote voter turnout for the 2024 elections. In an election year where we are implementing several significant new policies – semi-open primaries, online voter registration, and on-going absentee – it will be critical for the elections division to provide clerks with the necessary posters and materials so the public is aware of these changes while at their town office or polling place.

2. Provides funding for software licenses and maintenance expenses for a rule making application and database to facilitate efficiency and accessibility of agency rulemaking across agencies statewide. The All Other request is **\$50,000 in FY2023-24 and \$150,000 in FY2024-25**.

This initiative provides funding for software to manage agency rulemaking and facilitate better public access. The proposed software would include multi-agency access and permissions, workflow

management, status management, sensitive data management and archiving, notifications and reminders, and a public view. This initiative aligns with my office's goal of modernizing our processes and systems in order to enable agencies to track rulemaking more closely and allow the public to easily navigate rules open to public comment as well as the finalized rules.

3. Provides funding for software licenses and maintenance expenses for a Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) request application and database to facilitate public records requests. The All Other request is **\$20,585 in FY2023-24 and \$14,585 in FY2024-25.**

The initiative provides funding for a single-solution approach to fulfilling public records requests and manage appeals in a timely manner. In the last four years our office has seen a significant increase in the number of FOAA requests, with the vast majority of the requests seeking records related to elections. Given the current political climate, we foresee these requests continuing to increase in volume and breadth. Prompt and thorough fulfillment of public records requests related to elections is a cornerstone of public trust in elections. Our current processes without the appropriate tools results in hundreds of hours of manual review of thousands of pages to make determinations on whether something does or does not fall under the public records statute. Oftentimes, FOAA requests and the subsequent research processes are duplicative. This new software is designed to track requests from receipt through completion and to facilitate public access to those requests; the solution will reduce staff hours dedicated to FOAA requests and increase public trust.

4. Establishes one Office Specialist II position and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$95,165 in FY 2024-25.** The All Other request is **\$11,207 in FY 2024-25.**

The initiative provides funding for a dedicated administrative position to serve as a person of contact for visitors and to process incoming large volume of phone calls to the elections division. Currently, this function is provided by Corporations, Uniform Commercial Code, and Commissions staff, but since there is not sufficient space at the Burton M. Cross Office Building – where these two divisions share office space – Corporations is relocating to a different building with the corresponding staff and won't be able to staff the elections division. Given the frequent number of calls and visitors coupled with the immense demands on the election division staff, they do not have capacity to assign a current member of the staff – or even rotate staff – to fill this role. A devoted Office Specialist II position is vital to ensure timely services for members of the public, candidates, political parties and clerks and ensure that elections staff can concentrate on their ongoing roles and responsibilities.

5. Establishes one Public Service Coordinator I position and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$112,823 in FY 2024-25.** The All Other request is **\$11,207 in FY 2024-25.**

This initiative provides funding for a position to serve as the Public Relations Specialist and Freedom of Access Act Officer dedicated to elections. The position will ensure that all information used by the public on elections forms, letters, brochures, pamphlets, website content and social media posts is consistent, accurate, and up to date. This position will ensure the prompt and thorough fulfillment of records requests for thousands of pages of elections records annually. This position will also compose responses to inquiries about voting and elections that are received daily by the Elections Division.

There is one Federally funded initiative on page A-129

Elections and Commissions 0693

1. Establishes one limited-period Public Services Coordinator I position through August 31, 2026 to serve as an Election Security Navigator and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$108,758 in FY 2024-25**. The All Other request is **\$41,242 in FY 2024-25**.

This initiative allocates funds from a federal grant already awarded for a position to serve as the Elections Security Navigator to aid municipalities in establishing cybersecurity protections for elections security. Because many municipalities have technological limitations, this position will support municipalities in identifying cybersecurity risks, cataloging networks and systems, and transitioning to the .gov domain to improve cybersecurity. The position will advise municipalities on the implementation of Elections Baseline Security controls and provide technical assistance and training to municipalities.

This concludes my testimony on the items included in the Governor's proposed FY 2024-2025 Supplemental budget. I would be happy to answer your questions now or at the work session. Thank you for your consideration.