

Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134
Date: Friday, July 8, 2022 at 5:41:28 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: GeneralCounsel
To: AO Records
CC: GeneralCounsel
Attachments: 7.8.22 Documents.zip, How to appeal the withholding of information under 552.136.pdf

EXTERNAL SENDER

Good afternoon,

Consistent with our June 17 email, please find the attached zipped folder containing documents responsive to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

The responsive documents contain email addresses of the general public. An email address of a member of the public is confidential under section 552.137 of the Texas Government Code. The attorney general authorized all governmental bodies to withhold an email address of a member of the public without first requesting an attorney general opinion in Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009). Thus, this information has been redacted.

The information you requested contains a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body. This information is confidential under section 552.136 of the Texas Government Code. Section 552.136 allows us to withhold this specific information without requesting a ruling from the attorney general. You have the right to appeal our decision to withhold this information from you. Instructions for appeal are attached. If you do not want to appeal, you do not need to do anything else.

We appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you additional responsive documents on a rolling basis—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—with our next production by 5:00 p.m. on July 22, 2022. See Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, June 17, 2022 4:18 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

Regarding our May 27 email, we appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you additional responsive documents on a rolling basis—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—with our next production by 5:00

p.m. on July 8, 2022. See Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, May 27, 2022 2:41 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

Regarding our April 29 email, we appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you additional responsive documents on a rolling basis—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—with our next production by 5:00 p.m. on June 17, 2022. See Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, April 29, 2022 3:31 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

Consistent with our April 1 email, please find the attached zipped folder containing documents responsive to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

The responsive documents contain email addresses of the general public. An email address of a member of the public is confidential under section 552.137 of the Texas Government Code. The attorney general authorized all governmental bodies to withhold an email address of a member of the public without first requesting an attorney general opinion in Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009). Thus, this information has been redacted.

We appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you any additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on May 27, 2022. See Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, April 1, 2022 2:24 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

We appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you any additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on April 29, 2022. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2022 3:32 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

Regarding our February 28 email, we appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you any additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on April 1, 2022. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 28, 2022 4:38 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

Consistent with our February 7 letter, please see the attached document containing information responsive to Items 1-5 of your request. We appreciate your patience as we continue to process this portion of your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you any additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on March 21, 2022. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

We received your clarification with respect to Items 6 and 7 and will address this clarified portion of the request on March 4, 2022.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 7, 2022 3:51 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Good afternoon,

Please see the attached letter in response to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel
Sent: Wednesday, January 26, 2022 2:03 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092) PIR 22-0134

Thank you for contacting the Office of the Texas Secretary of State. This email acknowledges receipt of your request for information under the Public Information Act, and we will process it in accordance with Chapter

552 of the Texas Government Code.

We will let you know if we have any questions or need clarification.

Regards,

Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: AO Records <records@americanoversight.org>
Sent: Monday, January 24, 2022 2:28 PM
To: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0092)

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Dear Public Information Officer:

Please find attached a request for records under the Texas Public Information Act.

Sincerely,

--

Sarah Wishingrad
Pronouns: she/her
Paralegal
American Oversight
records@americanoversight.org
www.americanoversight.org | @weareoversight

PIR: TX-SOS-22-0092

From: [S L Courtney](#)
To: [Sam Taylor](#)
Subject: 2020 election audit
Date: Tuesday, November 23, 2021 1:46:21 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Stupid way to spend \$4,000,000. The election is done. Move on.

Subject: Anne Allensworth - Audit Funding
Location: (877) 226-9790; Access Code [REDACTED]

Start: Thu 12/2/2021 3:00 PM
End: Thu 12/2/2021 3:30 PM
Show Time As: Tentative

Recurrence: (none)

Meeting Status: Not yet responded

Organizer: Adam Bitter
Required Attendees: Joe Esparza

From: [Sam Taylor](#)
To: [John Scott](#); [Joe Esparza](#); [Adam Bitter](#); [Christina Adkins](#); [Keith Ingram](#); [Kristi Hart](#)
Subject: Dallas Morning News: Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, GOP leaders shift \$4M to pay for election audits called for in new state law
Date: Friday, November 19, 2021 12:21:42 PM
Sensitivity: Personal

FYI:

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, GOP leaders shift \$4M to pay for election audits called for in new state law

Bob Garrett

Dallas Morning News

November 19, 2021

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2021/11/19/texas-gov-greg-abbott-gop-leaders-shift-4m-to-pay-for-election-audits-called-for-in-new-state-law/>

AUSTIN — Saying state lawmakers didn’t budget enough money, Gov. Greg Abbott and GOP legislative leaders on Friday cited an honest-elections “emergency” as they shifted \$4 million from the state prison system to the secretary of state’s office to pay for county election audits required by the new Texas elections law.

The secretary of state’s office, under Abbott’s effective control, would create an Election Audit Division to conduct the randomized county audits the new law calls for after the next midterm and presidential elections – and thereafter, every two years.

That’s an important step “to stop voter fraud,” Abbott said in his money request to top Republican lawmakers.

Implicit but unstated in Abbott’s letter, and the leaders’ hasty reply granting consent, is that the \$4 million for hiring, training and deploying election auditors presumably would beef up the rigor – and credibility – of a backward-looking audit the secretary of state’s office already is formulating. It’ll study results of the November 2020 election in four counties.

Officials in Republican leadership offices at the Capitol said Abbott’s move is aimed primarily at an “audience of one” – former President Donald Trump, who has belittled the four-county audit as “weak.” Even though Trump carried Texas by nearly 6 percentage points, he demanded that Abbott push through a law requiring a statewide look-back at the 2020 general election.

Abbott did not add election audits as a topic for any of three overtime sessions of the Legislature he called this year.

However, as his spokeswoman Renae Eze has been saying for weeks, the Republican governor averred in his letter requesting the \$4 million, “Currently, the SOS [secretary of state’s office] is conducting the largest forensic audit in the country.”

Abbott referred to a Sept. 23 announcement by the then-leaderless office that “a full and

comprehensive forensic audit” of November 2020 results was under way in four of the state’s most populous counties – Dallas, Harris, Tarrant and Collin counties. The announcement came just hours after Trump issued a statement pressing for a statewide review of the 2020 vote.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Chris Turner ladled out the scorn, attributing the move by the secretary of state’s office to a governor worried about winning a third term next year.

“Pitiful yet predictable that (Abbott) has capitulated to Trump yet again,” Turner tweeted.

‘Trust and confidence’

On Thursday, writing Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Speaker Dade Phelan, R-Beaumont, Abbott said Senate Bill 1 will help build “trust and confidence” in electoral processes and outcomes.

Lawmakers passed the “election integrity” measure in the second special session. Abbott signed it on Sept. 7.

Democrats and voting rights advocates have said SB 1 will reduce participation by minorities and encourage mayhem by partisan poll watchers at voting places.

The controversial new law, which takes effect Dec. 2, requires the secretary of state’s office to audit four random Texas counties after each midterm and presidential election and review not only that contest, but all elections from the previous two years in what could be a massive and costly undertaking. At least two of the audited counties must have 300,000 residents or more, meaning the state’s 18 largest counties will be checked far more regularly than the rest.

The secretary of state’s office’s Sept. 23 announcement picked the same number of counties for the retrospective audit as the bill calls for prospectively – four. But they’re all highly populous counties.

Even though lawmakers met in a third special session that lasted through Oct. 19, Abbott’s money-request letter makes a sudden declaration that “the SOS needs resources to establish an Election Audit Division. However, the SOS does not currently have the budget authority to adequately accomplish the goals sought by the Legislature.”

In their letter of response, Patrick, Phelan, Senate Finance Committee Chairwoman Jane Nelson and House Appropriations Committee Chairman Greg Bonnen said the secretary of state’s office wasn’t given enough money in the current two-year budget cycle “to ensure election integrity.”

The leaders continued, “This insufficiency of funds creates an emergency.”

While Trump has said “Texans know voting fraud occurred in some of their counties” in 2020, the Texas secretary of state’s office has called the election here “smooth and secure.”

Nationally, experts have said vote fraud is rare and has posed a threat of altering outcomes only in relatively small, local contests. Voting rights advocates and Democrats have said that by perpetuating a “big lie” that last year’s presidential election was tainted, Trump and Republicans

who bow to his will have weakened Americans' trust in one of their signature democratic institutions – free and fair elections, and peaceful transfers of power.

The fund shift comes as Abbott is under fire from Republican challengers in the March 1 primary, including former Dallas state Sen. Don Huffines and former state GOP chairman Allen West. Like Trump, Huffines and West have bandied about accusations of election improprieties – without offering evidence.

The fund shift also comes just more than eight weeks after Abbott resisted Trump's entreaties for the governor to ask the Legislature to pass an election-audit bill. Though Abbott balked, in the year's final two special sessions, the Senate passed bills by Sen. Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston, that would have required an audit of the 2020 election and created a process in which party officials could trigger state audits of suspected future irregularities.

Patrick, who is Trump's top political ally in Texas, is the Senate's presiding officer. Though Patrick urged the House also to pass the bills, House members did not.

In Friday's letter pulling money from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and giving it to the secretary of state's office, now led by longtime Abbott aide John Scott, the leaders didn't specify how many employees the newly created Election Audit Division will have.

Novel 'budget execution' approach

The \$4 million transfer of the requested funds was done under a process known as "budget execution authority."

Under state law, the governor and the Legislative Budget Board, a 10-member group of key lawmakers that is co-chaired by the lieutenant governor and House speaker, can move around money already appropriated if they find there's an emergency. Usually, they publish the proposal in the Texas Register and then hold a board meeting to ratify the decision.

Friday's hurry-up transfer occurred without the customary formalities, and came after Abbott spent several days at a meeting of the Republican Governors Association in Phoenix.

On Aug. 6, the leaders used a similar process – a letter, not a meeting – to restore an additional month of funding for the legislative branch. In June, Abbott had line-item vetoed \$316 of the \$410 million budgeted for the Legislature and its support agencies after House Democrats broke quorum in the regular session to halt passage of the election bill. "No pay for those who abandon their responsibilities," Abbott tweeted in late May. In the year's second special session, lawmakers restored the funding.

The money would come from the state prison system – as did \$250 million last summer that was transferred to jump-start Abbott's border barrier. In their overtime gatherings this fall, lawmakers restored the money. Prisons didn't sustain cuts, and are likely to have the \$4 million put back when the Legislature next meets, probably in January 2023.

In the two-year budget cycle that ends Aug. 31, 2023, Texas can expect to have nearly \$25 billion of unspent state funds – a sum that dwarfs the \$4 million being applied to election audits. However, to use any of that money, lawmakers would have to be in session.

From: [Yvonne Ramon](#)
To: [Keith Ingram](#); [Christina Adkins](#)
Subject: Election Audit Division
Date: Monday, November 22, 2021 11:17:55 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Good morning, Keith and Christina,

Now that you know that 4 million dollars will go into creating the new Election Audit Division within your department, will you be able to tell us how much is left over to send counties that qualify for the 100% reimbursement for the retrofit of the election equipment?

I don't know what else to tell my budget director as we prepare to pay for the additional cost associated with the complete conversion. We will be ready to use our converted equipment during the primary of 2022, so our window is quite small.

Thank you in advance for any updated information you can provide.

Respectfully,

Yvonne Ramón, CERA, REO
Elections Administrator
County of Hidalgo
(956) 318-2570

From: [t c](#)
To: [Elections Internet; info@gregabbott.com](#)
Subject: Election Audit: Nov 2020
Date: Monday, December 6, 2021 5:03:07 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Good afternoon;

I understand that Gov Abbott approved \$4million to support an election audit in 4 counties. I would like information about how, when, where and whom will conduct these audits. Have they started yet? Please plan to inform Texans about the process, goals, and status—by county.

Thank you
Theodore Croy
San Antonio TX

Subject: Election Staffing
Location: SOS Exec Conf rm

Start: Mon 11/29/2021 10:30 AM
End: Mon 11/29/2021 11:00 AM
Show Time As: Tentative

Recurrence: (none)

Meeting Status: Not yet responded

Organizer: Joe Esparza
Required Attendees: Keith Ingram; Dan Teczar; Dara Stone; Adam Bitter; Vincent Houston

To begin after directors meeting:

Short meeting on election and support staffing for audit.

From: [1# Brat](#)
To: [Sam Taylor](#)
Subject: Forensic Audit of the November 2020 Election
Date: Friday, December 10, 2021 5:18:25 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Dear Sir,

Can I just say that I'm EXTREMELY disappointed in the fact that Texas is wasting so much tax payer money that could actually be put to use to help Texans like myself that suffer from disability and are raising children with special needs due to absolutely no fault of my own! I live in an area of Texas that is completely lacking in so many resources for mental health, the elderly and disabled.

It honestly feels like constituents like myself that paid taxes from the age of 16 until becoming disabled in 2009 are just tossed away like the trash. Yet, money and resources that could go to improve these services are being wasted in an election that has passed and won't do anything to change the results.

It makes me feel like my choice to not vote for Texas Republicans is the absolute correct choice!! Sir please please consider pressuring our representatives to do the right thing for all Texas constituents rather than helping the rich stay rich!

Sent from my iPhone

From: [John Porretto](#)
To: [Sam Taylor](#)
Subject: Forensic audit
Date: Friday, December 10, 2021 6:38:27 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

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How much will this cost and was this put out for bid.

John Porretto
VerdeCapitalResources, LLC
www.verdecapitalresources.com
[\(713\) 703-7300](tel:7137037300)

This information contained in this email is CONFIDENTIAL. If you have received this message in error or without the express direction of the original author, please notify sender and delete this email immediately.

From: [Annell Neale](#)
To: [Sam Taylor](#)
Subject: Full Forensic Audit for Texas Elections
Date: Monday, November 22, 2021 1:09:09 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

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I have voted in every election since I became eligible over 50 years ago. I have never had anything but faith in the Texas Election system. I am angry that you now feel it necessary to perform one now USING MY TAX DOLLARS! If you want to audit the system please examine ways to make it easier for Texans to vote in all elections.

Annell Neale
1042 Catalina Pl
Corpus Christi, TX 78412

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows

From: [Alma Casas](#)
To: [Sam Taylor](#)
Subject: Full Forensic Audit will Restore Faith in Texas Elections
Date: Monday, November 22, 2021 3:16:41 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

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To Texas State Secretary John Scott,

It is bad enough that Governor Abbott is bowing to pressure from Trump, but now you, too? Why spend \$4M on an audit that will not change the outcome of the 2020 election? What's even more ridiculous is that Trump won the state! If you truly want to RESTORE voters' confidence, then audit EVERY COUNTY IN THE STATE! What a joke and misuse of taxpayer funds. You know, I used to respect the Republicans, although I didn't agree with them; but continuing to perpetuate the BIG LIE, by wasting taxpayer funds is beyond the pale.

Alma Casas

Sent from my iPhone

From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:02 PM
To: John Scott; Joe Esparza; Keith Ingram; Adam Bitter; Christina Adkins
Subject: FW: Governor Abbott Approves Funding To Launch Election Audit Division Within Texas Secretary Of State's Office

And here's the gov's statement:

From: Governor Greg Abbott Press Office <GovernorAbbottPress@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:01 PM
To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Governor Abbott Approves Funding To Launch Election Audit Division Within Texas Secretary Of State's Office

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

For Immediate Distribution | November 19, 2021 | (512) 463-1826

Governor Abbott Approves Funding To Launch Election Audit Division Within Texas Secretary Of State's Office

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott [today approved](#) a Legislative Budget Board proposal transferring the funding needed for the Texas Secretary of State's office to establish a new Election Audit Division. This division will be conducting comprehensive forensic audits in the State of Texas. Currently, the Texas Secretary of State is conducting the largest forensic audit in the country.

The Governor requested [these funds on Thursday](#). The Lt. Governor and Speaker issued a proposal for the transfer this morning and the Governor approved it.

"Ensuring the integrity of our elections is critical to our democracy, and the Texas Secretary of State's office deserves the resources and support needed to thoroughly complete this ongoing task," said Governor Abbott. "The people of Texas must have trust and confidence in the election process, as well as the outcomes of our elections, which is why the state of Texas will transfer funding needed so that the Texas Secretary of State can create a division dedicated entirely to this important issue."

###

Please DO NOT REPLY to this message. It comes from an un-monitored mailbox. If you have any questions regarding this announcement, please contact the Governor's Press Office at (512) 463-1826.

[GovDelivery](#), Inc. sending on behalf of the Office of the Governor · P.O. Box 12428 · Austin TX 78711-2428 · 800-843-5789

From: [Sam Taylor](#)
To: [John Scott](#); [Joe Esparza](#); [Adam Bitter](#)
Subject: FYI - HOUSTON CHRONICLE: Advocates, legal experts decry Gov. Greg Abbott diverting \$4M in state prisons funding for election audits
Date: Tuesday, November 23, 2021 12:53:01 PM
Sensitivity: Personal

Advocates, legal experts decry Gov. Greg Abbott diverting \$4M in state prisons funding for election audits

Ariana Garcia

Houston Chronicle

November 23, 2021

<https://www.chron.com/politics/article/Texas-election-audit-Greg-Abbott-Trump-16645026.php>

Gov. Greg Abbott on Friday signed off on the transfer of \$4 million from the state prison system to the secretary of state's office to fund county election audits to "ensure election integrity," a move that some criminal justice advocates have since denounced. The new Election Audit Division will study the results of the November 2020 election in four Texas counties.

"Ensuring the integrity of our elections is critical to our democracy, and the Texas Secretary of State's office deserves the resources and support needed to thoroughly complete this ongoing task," Abbott said in a Friday news release. "The people of Texas must have trust and confidence in the election process, as well as the outcomes of our elections, which is why the state of Texas will transfer funding needed so that the Texas Secretary of State can create a division dedicated entirely to this important issue."

In a letter sent to Abbott, GOP legislative leaders Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick and Texas Speaker of the House Dade Phelan, proposed the transfer from the state prison system, saying the secretary of state's office wasn't given enough money in the current two-year-budget cycle "to ensure election integrity," and therefore, "this insufficiency of funds creates an emergency." State law allows a Legislative Budget Board to shift money already appropriated if they find there's an emergency.

Michelle Deitch, a law professor from the University of Texas at Austin who specializes in analyzing prison and jail conditions, said in an email that while it's unclear what parts of the prison agency's budget will be directly affected, many parts of the prison system are already underfunded. She added the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is dangerously understaffed and the provision of health care to incarcerated people as well as food budgets are always a concern.

"You can't take \$4 million away from operations and services without impacting the quality of those services or the health and safety of incarcerated people and staff," Deitch wrote. "Defunding a law enforcement agency like this has the potential to put a lot of incarcerated people and staff at risk."

In October, lawmakers gave the Texas Department of Criminal Justice nearly \$360 million in federal funds for employee pay and benefits, to use instead of state discretionary money, according to Robert T. Garrett of the Dallas Morning News. Robert Hurst, a spokesperson for the Texas

Department of Criminal Justice said the \$4 million is "likely to be returned before it's needed through supplement appropriations," but did not confirm how or when.

A similar transfer of \$250 million from the state prison system was used to start Abbott's border barrier, according to the Dallas Morning News. However, lawmakers restored the money this fall so prisons didn't sustain cuts.

Krishnaveni Gundu, co-founder and executive director of criminal justice reform organization Texas Jail Project, said in an emailed statement that understaffing and a lack of resources are already endangering the lives of incarcerated individuals, especially those who are ill or disabled. "We have been hearing lately from pretrial detainees of Operation Lonestar and they are all complaining about lack of food (they get fed at 3 a.m. and 4 p.m.) and lack of access to phone calls (only one free phone call per day unlike individuals incarcerated in county jails) and of course inadequate representation," Gundu wrote.

Alycia Castillo, director of policy and advocacy at Texas Center for Justice and Equity, in an email said the move by Abbott was unsurprising, adding the state always fails to acknowledge the humanity of incarcerated people.

"People in our state's prisons endure torturous and inhumane conditions that we bring up every legislative session, only to be told that we can't afford to address them," Castillo wrote, "so it is an insult and an outrage when the Governor cuts from that very same 'too small' budget to fund a strictly politically-motivated audit, without a plan to safely decarcerate TDCJ and county jails because it may cost more lives"

Castillo said the announcement only makes it more urgent to significantly stop the flow of people into the prison system, starting with the elderly, parole-eligible and medically vulnerable.

"There are about 118,000 people trapped in those prisons and 10s of thousands in county jails," Castillo wrote. "With more reductions to the budget, it is absolutely essential to relieve the overcrowding in Texas' prison system. Budget cuts to the prison system should coincide with people's safe release, otherwise, more people will die."

The governor's office did not respond to a request for comment as of the time of this writing.

From: [Sam Taylor](#)
To: [John Scott](#); [Joe Esparza](#); [Adam Bitter](#); [Keith Ingram](#); [Christina Adkins](#)
Bcc: [Sam Taylor](#)
Subject: FYI - Statesman Column: What if that \$4 million went toward helping Texans instead?
Date: Wednesday, November 24, 2021 10:58:36 AM
Sensitivity: Personal

FYI - See commentary from Rep. Howard in the below column published this morning (missed it in my clips roundup):

What if that \$4 million went toward helping Texans instead?

Bridget Grumet

Austin American-Statesman

November 24, 2021

<https://www.statesman.com/story/news/columns/2021/11/24/grumet-what-if-4-million-went-toward-helping-texans-instead/8725301002/>

They could have spent the money to help Texans.

They decided instead to spend our taxpayer dollars to appease Donald Trump.

Last week Gov. Greg Abbott and GOP legislative leaders used their emergency powers to move \$4 million out of the state prison budget to fund election audits — this, despite the fact that the secretary of state’s office declared the 2020 elections to be “smooth and secure.” This, despite the fact that three-quarters of Texans believe the election results to be somewhat or very accurate, according to the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune poll.

The reporting by The Dallas Morning News’ Robert T. Garrett leaves no doubt about the motivations behind this \$4 million effort: “Officials in Republican leadership offices at the Capitol said Abbott’s move is aimed primarily at an ‘audience of one’ — former President Donald Trump,” who had belittled Abbott’s earlier plan to audit only four counties’ election results as “weak.”

Some might argue: It’s only \$4 million. What difference does that make in the state’s two-year budget of \$248 billion?

“But the fact is, that \$4 million could cover a lot of other things that might actually make a difference,” state Rep. Donna Howard, an Austin Democrat, told me.

For instance, if Texas had an extra \$4 million to spend:

Lawmakers could have restored the \$1 million that was cut from the \$20 million Nursing Shortage Reduction Program, designed to get more people through nursing school and into the health care jobs where they are desperately needed.

Lawmakers could have put extra money toward child care subsidies, which would help more parents get back to work and more businesses move forward. Texas remains one of a handful of states that put the minimum amount of federal funding toward child care subsidies.

Lawmakers could have put \$830,000 toward a pilot program to provide pregnant women on Medicaid with doulas, trained professionals who provide support during the pregnancy. Studies have shown doula-assisted mothers are four times less likely to have a low birth weight baby and less likely to experience birth complications.

Lawmakers could have put \$672,000 toward better supporting young adults aging out of the foster care system by extending certain services to age 23, not 21. That would keep a support system in place for these young adults while they are pursuing higher education.

Lawmakers could have put \$860,000 toward requiring the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to develop a plan to reduce the racial disparities in the treatment of families referred for services. A 2018 study found Black kids in Texas are nearly twice as likely to be removed from homes as white kids.

Or lawmakers could have put the full \$4 million toward expanding the Nurse-Family Partnership into underserved areas of East Texas, providing lower-income, first-time mothers with regular in-home visits by a registered nurse. The program elsewhere has improved health care outcomes for mothers and children, Howard told me.

Instead, Abbott put the \$4 million toward appeasing Trump.

Understandably, much of the debate over these “election audits” has centered not on the price tag, but on the cost to public confidence in our elections. Spending millions of dollars to scrutinize election results sends a message — an erroneous one — that our election results might not be that trustworthy.

As the nonpartisan League of Women Voters of Texas noted this fall, after state officials announced the first four-county review of 2020 election results, these audits “undermine the hard work of county election officials and workers. They are aimed at ripping our election process apart and undermining our democratic foundation.”

And they are also, the league noted, “a waste of state resources and taxpayer money.”

Even if it’s only \$4 million, those dollars could be put to much better use.

Grumet is the Statesman’s Metro columnist. Her column, ATX in Context, contains her opinions. Share yours via email at bgrumet@statesman.com or via Twitter at [@bgrumet](https://twitter.com/bgrumet).

From: Governor Greg Abbott Press Office <GovernorAbbottPress@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:01 PM
To: Sam Taylor
Subject: Governor Abbott Approves Funding To Launch Election Audit Division Within Texas Secretary Of State's Office

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GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

For Immediate Distribution | November 19, 2021 | (512) 463-1826

Governor Abbott Approves Funding To Launch Election Audit Division Within Texas Secretary Of State's Office

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott [today approved](#) a Legislative Budget Board proposal transferring the funding needed for the Texas Secretary of State's office to establish a new Election Audit Division. This division will be conducting comprehensive forensic audits in the State of Texas. Currently, the Texas Secretary of State is conducting the largest forensic audit in the country.

The Governor requested [these funds on Thursday](#). The Lt. Governor and Speaker issued a proposal for the transfer this morning and the Governor approved it.

"Ensuring the integrity of our elections is critical to our democracy, and the Texas Secretary of State's office deserves the resources and support needed to thoroughly complete this ongoing task," said Governor Abbott. "The people of Texas must have trust and confidence in the election process, as well as the outcomes of our elections, which is why the state of Texas will transfer funding needed so that the Texas Secretary of State can create a division dedicated entirely to this important issue."

###

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From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Sunday, November 21, 2021 6:56 AM
To: John Scott; Joe Esparza; Adam Bitter; Keith Ingram; Christina Adkins; Kristi Hart
Subject: HOUSTON CHRONICLE: John Scott: Full forensic audit will restore faith in Texas elections
Attachments: Full forensic audit will restore faith in Texas elections.pdf

Good Morning,

The Secretary's op-ed has been published by the *Houston Chronicle*. I've also attached a .pdf version for easy sharing to those who don't have subscription access. Please feel free to share with your networks and contacts as you see fit:

Full forensic audit will restore faith in Texas elections

By John. B Scott

Houston Chronicle

November 21, 2021

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Opinion-Full-forensic-audit-will-restore-faith-16636561.php>

For the past several election cycles, voters have faced a crisis of confidence in the very system that underpins our representative form of government. Whether it was the specter of foreign interference in our elections or allegations of widespread mail ballot fraud during the pandemic, voters have been hit with a barrage of reasons to doubt the system.

And, unsurprisingly, it's starting to take its toll on their faith in the integrity of our elections.

According to a Pew Research Center poll released earlier this year, large shares of Americans of both parties believe there is cheating in elections, with [79 percent indicating candidates or campaigns engage in illegal activity at least sometimes during elections](#).

This is why, in order to restore voters' confidence in the strength and resilience of our election systems, Texas is conducting the largest and most comprehensive forensic audit of the 2020 General Election.

Over the next several months, the Texas Secretary of State's Office will complete a top-to-bottom examination of election records in the two largest counties with Democratic Commissioners Courts — Harris and Dallas — as well as the two largest counties with Republican Commissioners Courts — Tarrant and Collin — accounting for [34 percent](#) of all votes cast in the historically high-turnout election last year. Commissioners Courts oversee each county's elections administrators, with whom our office will be working closely to obtain the materials and information we need to complete the full forensic audit.

While county election officials have already conducted partial manual recounts, election security assessments and voter eligibility verification, the Texas Forensic Audit goes well beyond any other legislative election audit proposals or models in other states. Our audit examines, among other items: chain of custody records of voted ballots and voting equipment, audit logs from electronic voting systems, and materials from Early Voting Ballot Boards and Signature Verification Committees to

ensure that mail ballots were not subjected to tampering and match the list of voters who requested them.

Importantly, this will be the country's most comprehensive "forensic" audit of the 2020 election, using analytical tools to examine the literal nuts and bolts of election administration to determine if any illegal activity may have occurred. Using the authority given to our agency by the Legislature, we will conduct additional full manual recounts of any and all precincts affected by election irregularities.

We will follow the facts, follow the evidence and ensure any cases of illegal voting or election crimes are investigated by the proper law enforcement authorities, including the Texas Attorney General's Office.

Texans should be encouraged by the dedicated county election officials who work cycle after cycle to conduct elections with the integrity and professionalism that voters deserve.

But voters also need peace of mind — they need assurances that Texas election law and federal laws protecting the rights of legal, eligible voters are being followed at every step in the process. When irregularities occur, no matter how inconsequential they may seem, it takes a concerted effort to restore voters' faith in elections.

For example, after a recount in a 2019 Midland ISD bond election flipped the results, a box of 836 uncounted ballots was discovered that ended up flipping the election again. Our office worked meticulously to retrace the steps of local election officials. We were able to determine exactly how they were misplaced and implement targeted training to fix any deficiencies that led to the election-changing irregularity.

Using those same methods and techniques, the Secretary of State's Office will endeavor to deliver the same peace of mind to Texas voters and ensure that any irregularities that compromise the integrity of our elections are uncovered, fixed and not repeated in future elections.

We will work to investigate claims of irregularities in Harris County, such as the allegation that the county initially reported 1,884 more votes than voters who checked in across several drive-thru locations during the 2020 General Election.

Most importantly, we are conducting this forensic election audit without any preconceived notions about what we are going to find. We will separate evidence from hearsay, facts from rumors and empirical data from unverifiable theories.

Ultimately, we want to make sure every single eligible Texas voter — regardless of political affiliation — knows that voting in our state is fair and secure, and that only legal votes are cast and counted.

Any crack in the confidence of our elections is a crack in the foundation of our democracy. We must restore confidence in the integrity of our elections before the entire structure crumbles under the weight of mistrust.

Scott is the 114th Texas secretary of state.

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Full forensic audit will restore faith in Texas elections

By John. B Scott

Houston Chronicle

November 21, 2021

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Opinion-Full-forensic-audit-will-restore-faith-16636561.php>

For the past several election cycles, voters have faced a crisis of confidence in the very system that underpins our representative form of government. Whether it was the specter of foreign interference in our elections or allegations of widespread mail ballot fraud during the pandemic, voters have been hit with a barrage of reasons to doubt the system.

And, unsurprisingly, it's starting to take its toll on their faith in the integrity of our elections.

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While county election officials have already conducted partial manual recounts, election security assessments and voter eligibility verification, the Texas Forensic Audit goes well beyond any other legislative election audit proposals or models in other states. Our audit examines, among other items: chain of custody records of voted ballots and voting equipment, audit logs from electronic voting systems, and materials from Early Voting

Ballot Boards and Signature Verification Committees to ensure that mail ballots were not subjected to tampering and match the list of voters who requested them.

Importantly, this will be the country's most comprehensive "forensic" audit of the 2020 election, using analytical tools to examine the literal nuts and bolts of election administration to determine if any illegal activity may have occurred. Using the authority given to our agency by the Legislature, we will conduct additional full manual recounts of any and all precincts affected by election irregularities.

We will follow the facts, follow the evidence and ensure any cases of illegal voting or election crimes are investigated by the proper law enforcement authorities, including the Texas Attorney General's Office.

Texans should be encouraged by the dedicated county election officials who work cycle after cycle to conduct elections with the integrity and professionalism that voters deserve.

But voters also need peace of mind — they need assurances that Texas election law and federal laws protecting the rights of legal, eligible voters are being followed at every step in the process. When irregularities occur, no matter how inconsequential they may seem, it takes a concerted effort to restore voters' faith in elections.

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Any crack in the confidence of our elections is a crack in the foundation of our democracy. We must restore confidence in the integrity of our elections before the entire structure crumbles under the weight of mistrust.

Scott is the 114th Texas secretary of state.

From: Texas Secretary of State Press Office <TXSoSPress@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Monday, November 22, 2021 11:03 AM
To: Sam Taylor
Subject: ICYMI: Secretary John Scott: Full Forensic Audit will Restore Faith in Texas Elections

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Texas Secretary of State

John B. Scott

For Immediate Distribution
November 22, 2021

Contact: Sam Taylor
smtaylor@sos.texas.gov
(512) 463-6116

ICYMI: Secretary John Scott: Full Forensic Audit will Restore Faith in Texas Elections

AUSTIN — Writing in the *Houston Chronicle* yesterday, Texas Secretary of State John Scott explained the need for the full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election currently underway, highlighting that the ultimate goal of the audit is to restore Texas voters' trust in our state's election systems. The column comes after Governor Abbott and state legislative leadership [approved \\$4 million for the creation of a permanent Election Audit Division](#) within the Texas Secretary of State's office to [complete the ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and subsequent audits required by Senate Bill 1](#).

"For the past several election cycles, voters have faced a crisis of confidence in the very system that underpins our representative form of government," Secretary Scott [wrote in the column](#).

"Whether it was the specter of foreign interference in our elections or allegations of widespread mail ballot fraud during the pandemic, voters have been hit with a barrage of reasons to doubt

the system. And, unsurprisingly, it's starting to take its toll on their faith in the integrity of our elections..."

"...This is why, in order to restore voters' confidence in the strength and resilience of our election systems, Texas is conducting the largest and most comprehensive forensic audit of the 2020 General Election."

Secretary Scott continued: "While county election officials have already conducted partial manual recounts, election security assessments and voter eligibility verification, the Texas Forensic Audit goes well beyond any other legislative election audit proposals or models in other states. Our audit examines, among other items: chain of custody records of voted ballots and voting equipment, audit logs from electronic voting systems, and materials from Early Voting Ballot Boards and Signature Verification Committees to ensure that mail ballots were not subjected to tampering and match the list of voters who requested them.

"Importantly, this will be the country's most comprehensive 'forensic' audit of the 2020 election, using analytical tools to examine the literal nuts and bolts of election administration to determine if any illegal activity may have occurred. Using the authority given to our agency by the Legislature, we will conduct additional full manual recounts of any and all precincts affected by election irregularities.

"We will follow the facts, follow the evidence and ensure any cases of illegal voting or election crimes are investigated by the proper law enforcement authorities, including the Texas Attorney General's Office.

"Texans should be encouraged by the dedicated county election officials who work cycle after cycle to conduct elections with the integrity and professionalism that voters deserve.

"But voters also need peace of mind — they need assurances that Texas election law and federal laws protecting the rights of legal, eligible voters are being followed at every step in the process. When irregularities occur, no matter how inconsequential they may seem, it takes a concerted effort to restore voters' faith in elections."

[Read Secretary Scott's full column in the *Houston Chronicle*.](#)

###

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From: [Adam Bitter](#)
To: [Anne Allensworth](#)
Cc: [Joe Esparza](#)
Subject: RE: Audit Funds
Date: Thursday, December 2, 2021 10:34:57 AM

Thanks, Anne. Yes, our office is in the Capitol—we are in 1E.8, just across from Senator Nelson’s office. Feel free to stop by there at 3:00 today if you would like to meet in person; or we can use the conference line that I sent around on Tuesday.

Best,

Adam

From: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Sent: Thursday, December 2, 2021 10:26 AM
To: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Cc: Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Audit Funds

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Adam-

Stacey had a conflict come up so it'll just be me. Do you office in the building? I'm not sure yet whether it'll be possible to do in person (I might be at home).

Thanks,

Anne

From: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 30, 2021 5:51 PM
To: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Cc: Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Audit Funds

Anne,

We can use the call-in line information below. Alternatively, if you all are in the office and would prefer to meet in person, that works fine for us. Both the Deputy and I plan to be here on Thursday.

(877) 226-9790

Access Code: [REDACTED]

Best regards,

Adam

From: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 30, 2021 1:11 PM
To: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Cc: Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Audit Funds

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Actually, can you send a meeting announcement or a call in line? My Committee Director, Stacey Gilliam, will be joining.

From: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 29, 2021 8:06 PM
To: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Cc: Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Re: Audit Funds

3:00 Thursday is great. My direct line is 512-463-0228.

On Nov 29, 2021, at 7:55 PM, Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov> wrote:

Thanks, Anne. I am in conferences for parts of the next few days. Are you available at 3:00 pm on Thursday? The Deputy SOS and I will join from our end, but we can have our Elections or Finance folks available (for this discussion or a subsequent one) if need be.

Best,

Adam

From: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 29, 2021 3:43 PM
To: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Cc: Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Audit Funds

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My apologies for just now responding to this.

I am free tomorrow afternoon (30th), anytime Wednesday, or Thursday afternoon. Just let me know your preference and we will get something on the calendar!

Best,

Anne

From: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 5:47 PM
To: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Cc: Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Audit Funds

Anne,

Thanks for your email. Yes, we can discuss at your convenience after Thanksgiving. So far, I am pretty opening the afternoon on Monday the 29th; I should also have some time on Thursday afternoon or Friday if later that week would be better for you.

Best regards,

Adam

Adam Bitter
General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State
(512) 475-2813
abitter@sos.texas.gov

From: Anne Allensworth <Anne.Allensworth@senate.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 4:00 PM
To: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: Audit Funds

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Adam-

Could we set up some time the week after thanksgiving to discuss the audit program and related funding?

Anne

From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 5:21 PM
To: 'Garrett, Robert T.'
Subject: RE: could I see your statement?

Hi Bob,

The total \$4M figure is for hiring new staff, including their travel budgets for on-site visits to the four counties during the audit process, so it's not possible to parse out exactly how much will be used on the 2020 General Election Audit vs the additional four-county audits required under Rep. Slaton's amendment to SB 1 (the one requiring us to randomly choose two counties over 300,000 and two counties under 300,000 for audits going forward). In short, this overall figure is for costs to conduct both current and ongoing election audits required under law passed by the lege.

Here's our full statement:

"We thank Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senator Nelson and Representative Bonnen for approving critical funds to support the Texas Secretary of State's Forensic Audit Division. In order to complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1, our agency will be using these funds to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: verifying counties' removal of ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county's election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws. These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters' confidence in our state's election systems."

Best,

Sam Taylor

Assistant Secretary of State for Communications

Office of the Texas Secretary of State

smtaylor@sos.texas.gov

Office: 512-463-6116

Cell: 512-538-5293



From: Garrett, Robert T. [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 5:08 PM
To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: could I see your statement?

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Sam,

Did you say how much of the \$4M would be used for the 2020, four-county audit?

I see reference in Trib story (below).

Thanks,

Bob

--

Robert T. Garrett
Austin Bureau Chief
The Dallas Morning News
M: (512) 413-7793
O: (512) 370-3815

Know now.

The Dallas Morning News

In a statement later Friday, the secretary of state's office referenced both its 2020 audit and future audits required under the new state law, saying that the latest funds would be used for "additional staff to oversee audit activities," such as "verifying counties' removal of ineligible voters from the rolls ... and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws."

From: [Sam Taylor](#)
To: [Keith Ingram](#); [Adam Bitter](#); [John Scott](#); [Joe Esparza](#); [Christina Adkins](#)
Subject: RE: Election Audit Division Funding
Date: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:00:37 PM

Story has been published (it's behind a paywall):

Texas Lawmaker Says \$4 Million Was Approved for Election Audit

Daniel Friend

The Texan

November 19, 2021

https://thetexan.news/texas-lawmaker-says-4-million-was-approved-for-election-audit/?lp_txn_id=41267

Rep. Greg Bonnen (R-Friendswood), the chairman of the Texas House Appropriations Committee, announced on social media Friday afternoon that he “joined state leaders in approving \$4 million to fund forensic election audits in Texas.”

“[M]y signature of approval was required to send this critical funding to the Secretary of State’s office so they can conduct the important work of making certain every vote counts,” said Bonnen. “Texas continues to stand up for the integrity of our elections!”

Assistant Secretary of State for Communications Sam Taylor confirmed Bonnen’s announcement in a statement provided to The Texan.

“We thank Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senator Nelson and Representative Bonnen for approving critical funds to support the Texas Secretary of State’s Forensic Audit Division,” said Taylor.

The funneling of money is the latest in a political squabble over election audits in Texas.

Former President Donald Trump called on Gov. Greg Abbott to use his authority to place the policy in question before lawmakers while they were convened in a special session earlier this year, but Abbott never acquiesced.

Instead, the office of the secretary of state — a position which had been vacant at the time but is now filled by former Abbott aide John Scott — announced that it was in the process of conducting a smaller-scale audit of the 2020 general election in the two most populous Democratic and Republican counties.

The measure from Abbott’s office faced scrutiny from both the left — who argue an audit is unnecessary and that it is dangerous to question the legitimacy of elections — and the right — who say that the scale of the audit is not enough.

Even Republicans in the Texas Senate thought that a broader audit was necessary. Despite not being

added to the special session agenda, the upper chamber approved legislation that would enact a sweeping evaluation of the 2020 general election results across Texas.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said in a campaign email that he “requested a 4th Special Session to address [restoring the penalty for illegal voting that had been reduced in the major election bill], as well as the Forensic Audit Bill.”

Patrick did not go so far as to blame the governor for failing to add the audit to the special session, directing his attack on House Speaker Dade Phelan instead.

“The Senate passed the Forensic Audit Bill twice, but the Speaker refused to bring it to the floor, along with several other issues,” said Patrick.

The secretary of state’s office said that the new funds being provided to them will be used to “complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1.”

More specifically, Taylor said that toward that end the money will be used “to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: verifying counties’ removal of ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county’s election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws.”

“These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters’ confidence in our state’s election systems,” said Taylor.

Abbott sent a letter to the top officials in the Legislative Budget Board — Patrick, Phelan, Bonnen, and Senate Finance Committee Chair Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) — dated November 18 requesting them to “provide \$4 million to the SOS in order to establish and Election Audit Division.”

“Election integrity is a core tenet of any healthy and successful democracy,” said Abbott. “The people of Texas must have trust and confidence in the election process as well as in the outcomes of our elections.”

The lawmakers agreed to that request in a letter sent to the governor in response on Friday, November 19.

According to the letter, the \$4 million in general revenue funds will be transferred to the secretary of state from money that was originally appropriated for “Correctional Security Operations.”

Abbott’s office has not released any statement regarding the new funds.

However, his office issued a media advisory on Friday for a press conference on the evening of Tuesday, November 23 during which Abbott will make “an economic announcement.”

From: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 2:28 PM

To: Keith Ingram <KIngram@sos.texas.gov>; Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>; John Scott <JScott@sos.texas.gov>; Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>; Christina Adkins <CAAdkins@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: RE: Election Audit Division Funding

Got it! Final version going shortly:

“We thank Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senator Nelson and Representative Bonnen for approving critical funds to support the Texas Secretary of State’s Forensic Audit Division. In order to complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1, our agency will be using these funds to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: verifying counties’ removal of ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county’s election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws. These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters’ confidence in our state’s election systems.”

From: Keith Ingram <KIngram@sos.texas.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 2:25 PM

To: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>; Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>; John Scott <JScott@sos.texas.gov>; Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>; Christina Adkins <CAAdkins@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: Re: Election Audit Division Funding

Agreed

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 2:23:44 PM

To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>; John Scott <JScott@sos.texas.gov>; Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>; Keith Ingram <KIngram@sos.texas.gov>; Christina Adkins <CAAdkins@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: RE: Election Audit Division Funding

Looks great to me. I would just add a reference to Speaker Phelan as well.

Here is a clean copy of the Governor’s letter to legislative leadership so that we all have it one place. The other version was a copy that we had received from Sarah and which had some notations from us on it.

From: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 2:22 PM

To: John Scott <JScott@sos.texas.gov>; Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>; Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>; Keith Ingram <KIngram@sos.texas.gov>; Christina Adkins <CAdkins@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: RE: Election Audit Division Funding

Revised with feedback incorporated:

“We thank Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Senator Nelson and Representative Bonnen for approving critical funds to support the Texas Secretary of State’s Forensic Audit Division. In order to complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1, our agency will be using these funds to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: verifying counties’ removal of ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county’s election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws. These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters’ confidence in our state’s election systems.”

Let me know when good to go!

-Sam

From: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 2:05 PM

To: John Scott <JScott@sos.texas.gov>; Joe Esparza <JEsparza@sos.texas.gov>; Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>; Keith Ingram <KIngram@sos.texas.gov>; Christina Adkins <CAdkins@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: FW: Election Audit Division Funding

Inquiry from *The Texan* (Konni Burton’s media outfit) below. I suggest that, in addition to the two letters, we provide the following statement:

“We are greatly appreciative of the critical funds allocated by the Governor and legislative leadership to fund the Texas Secretary of State’s Forensic Audit Division. In order to complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1, our agency will be using these funds to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: removing ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county’s election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws. These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying systemic issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters’ confidence in our state’s election systems.”

Let me know if y'all think any changes are needed. Thank you!

-Sam

From: Daniel Friend <dfriend@thetexan.news>

Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 1:28 PM

To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>

Subject: Election Audit Division Funding

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Hi Sam,

Are you able to provide any additional background information and/or statement regarding Rep. Greg Bonnen's [announcement](#) that he signed approval of \$4 million of funding for forensic election audits?

Additionally, do you know if it would be possible to obtain copies of the letters sent regarding the subject between Gov. Abbott and lawmakers that was [reported](#) by the *Dallas Morning News*?

If you're able to respond this afternoon, that would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,
Daniel

--

Daniel Friend
Reporter, [The Texan](#)
C: (918) 316-2703

From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 2:31 PM
To: 'Daniel Friend'
Subject: RE: Election Audit Division Funding
Attachments: Leadership Letter_11.19.21.pdf; Gov. Abbott Letter to Legislative Leadership 11.18.21.pdf

Hi Daniel,

Yes – I've attached both letters here and you can attribute the following statement to me/the Texas Secretary of State's office:

"We thank Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senator Nelson and Representative Bonnen for approving critical funds to support the Texas Secretary of State's Forensic Audit Division. In order to complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1, our agency will be using these funds to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: verifying counties' removal of ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county's election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws. These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters' confidence in our state's election systems."

Best,

Sam Taylor

Assistant Secretary of State for Communications

Office of the Texas Secretary of State

smtaylor@sos.texas.gov

Office: 512-463-6116

Cell: 512-538-5293



From: Daniel Friend [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 1:28 PM
To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Election Audit Division Funding

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Hi Sam,

Are you able to provide any additional background information and/or statement regarding Rep. Greg Bonnen's [announcement](#) that he signed approval of \$4 million of funding for forensic election audits?

Additionally, do you know if it would be possible to obtain copies of the letters sent regarding the subject between Gov. Abbott and lawmakers that was [reported](#) by the *Dallas Morning News*?

If you're able to respond this afternoon, that would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,
Daniel

--

Daniel Friend
Reporter, [The Texan](#)
C: (918) 316-2703



LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD

Robert E. Johnson Bldg.
1501 N. Congress Ave. - 5th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

512/463-1200
Fax: 512/475-2902
<http://www.lbb.state.tx.us>

November 19, 2021

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of the State of Texas
Capitol Building
Room 2S.1
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Governor Abbott,

Pursuant to Texas Government Code, Section 317.002, this budget execution order is proposed for the following action affecting items of appropriation made by Senate Bill No. 1, General Appropriations Act, Acts of the 87th Legislature, Regular Session, 2021.

There are not sufficient funds appropriated to the Secretary of State to ensure election integrity for the 2022-2023 state fiscal biennium and this insufficiency of funds creates an emergency. We therefore propose that:

From appropriations made to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice by Senate Bill No. 1, General Appropriations Act, Acts of the 87th Legislature, Regular Session, 2021, the amount of \$4,000,000 in General Revenue appropriated for fiscal year 2023 in Strategy C.1.1. Correctional Security Operations, shall be transferred to the Secretary of State for use during the 2022-2023 state fiscal biennium, for the purpose of ensuring election integrity.

Respectfully,

Handwritten signature of Dan Patrick in blue ink.

Dan Patrick
Lieutenant Governor
Joint Chair, Legislative Budget Board

Handwritten signature of Dade Phelan in black ink.

Dade Phelan
Speaker of the House
Joint Chair, Legislative Budget Board

Handwritten signature of Jane Nelson in black ink.

Jane Nelson
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Handwritten signature of Greg Bonnen in black ink.

Greg Bonnen
Chair, House Appropriations Committee



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

November 18, 2021

The Honorable Dan Patrick
Lieutenant Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Dade Phelan
Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Governor Patrick and Speaker Phelan,

Election integrity is a core tenet of any healthy and successful democracy. The people of Texas must have trust and confidence in the election process as well as in the outcomes of our elections.

The Legislature clearly showed a strong commitment to this principle when it passed Senate Bill 1 during the Second Called Session of the 87th Legislature, which I signed into law. This law makes it easier to vote—and harder to cheat—in Texas elections by expanding voting hours while also taking steps to stop voter fraud.

Importantly, the law includes county audits to be carried out by the Texas Secretary of State (SOS). Currently, the SOS is conducting the largest forensic audit in the country.

As we expand voting opportunities in Texas, we must also ensure the integrity of those elections. To do that, the SOS needs resources to establish an Election Audit Division.

However, the SOS does not currently have the budget authority to adequately accomplish the goals sought by the Legislature. That is why I am requesting that you provide \$4 million to the SOS in order to establish an Election Audit Division.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Abbott".

Greg Abbott
Governor

GA: cww

cc: The Honorable Jane Nelson, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Greg Bonnen, Chair, House Appropriations Committee

From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 5:33 PM
To: 'Windy Johnson'
Subject: RE: Election Audit Funds

Hi Windy,

Please see our statement from this afternoon after the funding was announced:
<https://twitter.com/TXsecofstate/status/1461815486551887872/photo/1>

Happy to chat at a later time if you'd like to know additional details. Thanks, have a great weekend!

Best,

Sam Taylor

Assistant Secretary of State for Communications
Office of the Texas Secretary of State
smtaylor@sos.texas.gov
Office: 512-463-6116
Cell: 512-538-5293



From: Windy Johnson <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 4:09 PM
To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Election Audit Funds

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Good afternoon Sam,

Hope you are doing well. Can you please share how the additional funds will be used for election audits? I know my counties have a particular interest in how it will affect us. Thank you!

Windy Johnson
Program Manager
Texas Conference of Urban Counties
500 W 13th St. | Austin TX 78701
P: 512.476.6174 Cell: 512.731.3246
E: [REDACTED] | W: www.cuc.org



January 12-14, 2022
Texas A&M Hotel & Conference Center
Early Registration - \$400
General Registration - \$425
Late Registration - \$475
cuc.org/cstat2022

From: [Jill Ledbetter](#)
To: [Robert Sumners](#); [Adam Bitter](#)
Subject: Re: Governor's budget execution order
Date: Sunday, November 21, 2021 7:51:47 PM

I received it from Greg late Friday. We're working on how it should look, but it will be published in the December 3 issue.

Thanks!
Jill

From: Robert Sumners <RSumners@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 11:03 AM
To: Jill Ledbetter <JLedbetter@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Governor's budget execution order

[Thanks! Robt.](#)

From: Jill Ledbetter <JLedbetter@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 11:03 AM
To: Robert Sumners <RSumners@sos.texas.gov>; Adam Bitter <ABitter@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Governor's budget execution order

Greg Davidson just called, asking about publication deadlines. We may have the budget execution order from them regarding the elections audit funding on Monday. If so, I will expedite it for December 3 publication even though our deadlines for December 3 are noon today. I'll keep you posted.

Thanks!
Jill

Jill S. Ledbetter
Editor-in-Chief, *Texas Register* and *Texas Administrative Code*
512-305-9623
jledbetter@sos.texas.gov

From: Henry Edwards <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, November 22, 2021 12:15 PM
To: Sam Taylor
Subject: Re: ICYMI: Secretary John Scott: Full Forensic Audit will Restore Faith in Texas Elections

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Dear Mr. Scott,

A Full Forensic Audit Will Not Restore Faith in Texas Elections

\$4m to perform an audit to indicate President Biden won and the former guy lost. What a tremendous waste of money. No illegal activity took place, my trust in the election process has never been an issue.

This is a partisan hack job to pay homage to the former guy. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Respectfully,

Henry Edwards

- - - - - Original Message - - - - -

On Monday, November 22nd, 2021 at 11:02 AM, Texas Secretary of State Press Office <TXSoSPress@public.govdelivery.com> wrote:



Texas Secretary of State

John B. Scott

For Immediate Distribution

November 22, 2021

Contact: Sam Taylor

smtaylor@sos.texas.gov

(512) 463-6116

ICYMI: Secretary John Scott: Full Forensic Audit will Restore Faith in Texas Elections

AUSTIN — Writing in the *Houston Chronicle* yesterday, Texas Secretary of State John Scott explained the need for the full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election currently underway, highlighting that the ultimate goal of the audit is to restore Texas voters' trust in our state's election systems. The column comes after Governor Abbott and state legislative leadership [approved \\$4 million for the creation of a permanent Election Audit Division](#) within the Texas Secretary of State's office to [complete the ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and subsequent audits required by Senate Bill 1](#).

"For the past several election cycles, voters have faced a crisis of confidence in the very system that underpins our representative form of government," Secretary Scott [wrote in the column](#).

"Whether it was the specter of foreign interference in our elections or allegations of widespread mail ballot fraud during the pandemic, voters have been hit with a barrage of reasons to doubt the system. And, unsurprisingly, it's starting to take its toll on their faith in the integrity of our elections..."

"...This is why, in order to restore voters' confidence in the strength and resilience of our election systems, Texas is conducting the largest and most comprehensive forensic audit of the 2020 General Election."

Secretary Scott continued: "While county election officials have already conducted partial manual recounts, election security assessments and voter eligibility verification, the Texas Forensic Audit goes well beyond any other legislative election audit proposals or models in other states. Our audit examines, among other items: chain of custody records of voted ballots and voting equipment, audit logs from electronic voting systems, and materials from Early Voting Ballot Boards and Signature Verification Committees to ensure that mail ballots were not subjected to tampering and match the list of voters who requested them.

"Importantly, this will be the country's most comprehensive 'forensic' audit of the 2020 election, using analytical tools to examine the literal nuts and bolts of election administration to determine if any illegal activity may have occurred. Using the authority given to our agency by the Legislature, we will conduct additional full manual recounts of any and all precincts affected by election irregularities.

"We will follow the facts, follow the evidence and ensure any cases of illegal voting or election crimes are investigated by the proper law enforcement authorities, including the Texas Attorney General's Office.

"Texans should be encouraged by the dedicated county election officials who work cycle after cycle to conduct elections with the integrity and professionalism that voters deserve.

"But voters also need peace of mind — they need assurances that Texas election law and federal laws protecting the rights of legal, eligible voters are being followed at every step in the process. When irregularities occur, no matter how inconsequential they may seem, it takes a concerted effort to restore voters' faith in elections."

[Read Secretary Scott's full column in the *Houston Chronicle*.](#)

###

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This email was sent to [REDACTED] using GovDelivery Communications Cloud on behalf of: Texas Secretary of State · 707 17th St, Suite 4000 · Denver, CO 80202

From: [Lesli Fitzpatrick](#)
To: [Kim Bergmann](#)
Subject: Re: Opportunity to meet new Secretary of State John Scott
Date: Monday, November 22, 2021 12:03:25 PM

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Dear Ms. Bergmann,

After we spoke on Friday, I learned that Governor Abbott transferred money from the Texas budget to the Secretary of State's Office to set up an Election Audit Division. I am VERY interested in talking to our new Secretary of State John Scott about working with him in this newly created division. I am hoping we can schedule something very soon for this discussion to occur. Please let me know and thank you again.

Best regards,

Lesli R. Fitzpatrick
Attorney at Law
512-426-5993

On Friday, November 19, 2021, 02:34:42 PM CST, Lesli Fitzpatrick <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Dear Ms. Bergmann,

Thank you for the opportunity to schedule an appointment to meet the new Secretary of State John Scott. I am passionate about Election Integrity in the State of Texas and would love to visit with Mr. Scott along these lines. I have attached my resume for his review. I know next week is a short week with Thanksgiving and all so maybe we can meet some time at the beginning of December. Please let me know if this is possible. Thank you again for your time today.

Best regards,

Lesli R. Fitzpatrick
Attorney at Law
512-426-5993

From: [Kristi Hart](#)
To: [Jimmy Gewin](#)
Subject: RE: Program Spclst V question
Date: Tuesday, December 7, 2021 5:52:32 PM
Sensitivity: Personal

This position will be with the Elections Audit Division. Basically, the work will be auditing election procedures and processes in counties around the state.

From: Jimmy Gewin <JGewin@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 7, 2021 1:03 PM
To: Kristi Hart <KHart@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Program Spclst V question
Sensitivity: Personal

Hi Kristi,

I have a question about the Program Spclst V position JP22-016. What kind of work is involved while traveling with this position?

Jimmy

From: Sam Taylor
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:20 PM
To: 'Cassandra Pollock'
Subject: RE: Texas Tribune inquiry

Hi Cassi,

Yes – you can attribute the following statement to me/the Texas Secretary of State's office:

“We thank Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senator Nelson and Representative Bonnen for approving critical funds to support the Texas Secretary of State’s Forensic Audit Division. In order to complete our ongoing full forensic audit of the 2020 General Election and conduct subsequent audits as required by SB 1, our agency will be using these funds to dedicate additional staff to oversee audit activities, including: verifying counties’ removal of ineligible voters from the rolls, meticulously reviewing each county’s election materials for our comprehensive document examination, and ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws. These resources are essential for maintaining the integrity of Texas elections and identifying issues that must be fixed in order to restore voters’ confidence in our state’s election systems.”

Best,

Sam Taylor

Assistant Secretary of State for Communications

Office of the Texas Secretary of State

smtaylor@sos.texas.gov

Office: 512-463-6116

Cell: 512-538-5293



From: Cassandra Pollock <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:18 PM
To: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Texas Tribune inquiry

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Hi Sam, it's Cassi with the Texas Tribune. Hope you're doing great.

Wanted to see if there was a statement from the SOS we could include about the emergency transfer of funds to the agency, announced this afternoon by Gov. Greg Abbott and other GOP leaders.

Please call anytime with questions: 972-358-8659.

Thanks,
Cassi

--

--

 **THE TEXAS TRIBUNE**

Cassi Pollock
Reporter

919 Congress Avenue
Sixth Floor
Austin, TX 78701
www.texastribune.org

M (972) 358-8659
@cassi_pollock

From: [Sam Taylor](#)
To: [John Scott](#); [Joe Esparza](#); [Adam Bitter](#); [Keith Ingram](#); [Christina Adkins](#)
Subject: Texas Scorecard: New Secretary of State Updates Texans on 2020 Election Audit
Date: Friday, November 19, 2021 4:03:10 PM
Sensitivity: Personal

FYI – piece from Sen. Paxton’s Town Hall is published:

New Secretary of State Updates Texans on 2020 Election Audit

Gov. Abbott approves funds for new Election Audit Division.

Erin Anderson

Texas Scorecard

November 19, 2021

<https://texasscorecard.com/state/new-secretary-of-state-updates-texans-on-2020-election-audit/>

Texas’ newly appointed chief election official provided voters in Collin County with a progress report this week on the state’s ongoing partial audit of the November 2020 election—efforts bolstered by \$4 million in funding announced today for a new Election Audit Division within the Texas secretary of state’s office.

In a virtual town hall meeting Wednesday hosted by State Sen. Angela Paxton (R–McKinney), Texas Secretary of State John Scott described the steps involved in the audit, what progress has been made, and why it’s important.

“It’s a huge undertaking, but one that’s necessary to restore confidence in our elections,” Scott told Paxton’s constituents in the meeting focused on election integrity.

Scott was appointed secretary of state in October, following a five-month vacancy in the position. At the time, he said his top priority was completing the internal audits.

Paxton’s Senate District 8 lies mostly within Collin County, one of the four counties included in the ongoing audit. She said election integrity was the most frequent topic of communications her office received this legislative session.

In September, prior to Scott’s appointment, the secretary of state’s office announced it had launched a “full and comprehensive forensic audit” of the 2020 general election in four Texas counties: Collin, Dallas, Harris, and Tarrant.

A week later, the office provided more details of exactly what the audit would entail and said it was being conducted in two phases.

Scott said Wednesday the first phase is “well underway.”

Phase 1 includes voter list maintenance, a routine process required by state and federal law of regularly removing ineligible people from voter rolls, including deceased voters, people who have moved away or are registered in multiple places, and non-U.S. citizens.

The process is enhanced this year with data from the Electronic Registration Information Center, a nationwide voter roll crosscheck program Texas joined in March 2020 that helps identify people who are improperly registered in the state or voted here illegally.

The first audit phase also included testing voting machine accuracy with partial manual recounts of paper ballots (also done routinely under current law) and a cybersecurity assessment of all counties' election systems.

Scott said he expects a report on Phase 1 by the end of the year, adding his office would be "fully transparent with the public" about the audit process and findings.

Phase 2 is "much more detailed" and includes "a 13-page list of items to be examined" for each of the four counties, Scott said, such as mail ballots, in-person ballots, voting machines, and more.

He said auditors would be looking at "a multitude of issues" beyond the risk-limiting audits already done, documenting information for almost 4 million votes—a third of all Texas votes cast in the 2020 presidential election.

The "forensic" aspect of the audit will reveal any issues that rise to the level of criminal activity, so they can be turned over to the attorney general's office to investigate and potentially prosecute.

The audit will also allow problems within the election process to be identified so specific recommendations for fixes can be made to the Legislature, and will offer a comparison of how effectively different county election offices operate.

"What we learn from these four counties can be extrapolated," Scott said.

"The purpose of the audit is to bring election integrity and restore confidence among voters that our elections are secure, only eligible voters are voting, and counts are not altered," he added.

"The public must have confidence in outcome of elections," Paxton said. "To do that, they must have confidence in the procedures and accuracy of the process."

But some election integrity advocates say the ongoing audit isn't enough.

Last month, the Collin County Republican Party adopted a resolution calling for a full forensic audit of the 2020 election in Texas.

Unlike the audit Scott's office is now overseeing, grassroots activists want an independent third-party review of the 13 largest counties in the state.

Collin Republicans' resolution said the state's current efforts are "not adequate to create confidence and answer all questions related to election integrity and the possibility of election fraud from the 2020 elections."

In a move that bolsters Scott's work, Abbott announced Friday an "emergency" budget transfer of \$4 million to establish a new Election Audit Division within the secretary of state's office:

"The people of Texas must have trust and confidence in the election process, as well as the outcomes of our elections, which is why the state of Texas will transfer funding needed so that the Texas Secretary of State can create a division dedicated entirely to this important issue."

From: [Dan Teczar](#)
To: [Joe Esparza](#); [Adam Bitter](#)
Date: Friday, November 19, 2021 3:38:38 PM

<https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-approves-funding-to-launch-election-audit-division-within-texas-secretary-of-states-office>