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June 21, 2018
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TOP FEDERAL, STATE OFFICIALS ADDRESS ILLINOIS ELECTION AUTHORITIES ON CYBERSECURITY

BLOOMINGTON -- With cybersecurity a prime concern ahead of Election Day, election authorities from throughout the state gathered here for a two-day briefing from some of the top federal and state experts on digital security in elections.

Presented by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and U.S. Department of Homeland Security and hosted by the Illinois Association of County Clerks and Recorders, the conference featured speakers who emphasized the need to enact security measures to guard against cyber attackers who may target the systems of election authorities at all levels of government.

"This is important in order to build the resilience of the process, working from the county to the state to the federal level to ensure that we are able to protect the systems but also detect and recover from any incidents that we have," said Matt Masterson, senior cybersecurity adviser for DHS.

Federal officials have said that the ultimate goal of election hackers is to erode confidence in democracy.

"When the goal is to undermine faith in the process, everyone is a target," Masterson said. "They only need to get into one of them to claim they're in all of them."

With cyber threats against government systems escalating in recent years, county clerks and other local election authorities have sought to tap state and federal resources to boost security in all their systems.

"One of the things about election officials in general is they're control freaks, so they understand the world they are living in," said Ryan Macias, senior election technology specialist with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. "This is something that has been put upon them but they are growing and understanding.

"They want to protect the integrity of elections and the democratic process more than anything."

The conference, attended by representatives of 67 of the state's 108 local election authorities, also featured presentations by the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology and Illinois State Police outlining resources available to local officials for assessing and enhancing local election systems. Also making

presentations were officials from the FBI and the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center, a non-profit data-sharing group that works to identify and notify its members of potential cyber threats.

In July 2016, cyber attackers [breached the Illinois State Board of Elections' electronic voter database](#) in an act DHS has attributed to hackers based in Russia. That incident, which did not disrupt elections, has been cited by federal security officials as an indicator of potential threats election authorities at all levels may face in 2018. This year, Illinois received \$13.2 million in federal funds for improving election security. Most of those funds will be used to create a Cyber Navigator Program that will establish a network of cyber security experts who will work with local authorities to enact enhanced security measures.

Steve Sandvoss, executive director of the Illinois State Board of Elections, used his opening remarks to encourage all conference attendees to join the Cyber Navigator Program.

"I think this cybersecurity conference will be very worthwhile and hopefully a good first step in our efforts to enhance your cybersecurity posture," Sandvoss said. "I would strongly encourage you all to spread the word to your colleagues and encourage them to participate in the Cyber Navigator Program. After all, no one wants to be 'that county' that suffers a cyber attack on election day."