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For immediate release

## State director: Systems in place ensure election integrity

Minnesota's elections and election results can be trusted, according to the elections director for the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office.

David Maeda on Tuesday assured Rice County commissioners that not only are systems in place to ensure election integrity, but that Rice County Elections staff are among the state's very best.

"Denise (Anderson, Property Tax and Elections director) did a stellar job," he said. "I look at her as a leader in this field. The way she ran this (past) election is to be commended."

With questions about the validity of the 2020 election still part of the national conversation and the 2022 election on the horizon, Maeda told the board that all voting equipment used in Minnesota must meet both state and federal standards. All equipment also goes through a rigorous testing process, which lasts about a month, before it goes into service, he said.

Maeda, who has about 25 years of experience as an elections administrator, served as Minnetonka city clerk and the elections director for Washington and Hennepin counties before moving into his current role.

Voting equipment must also go through a public test before each election. Any piece of equipment that isn't 100% accurate can not be used, he said.

Rice County will hold a public accuracy test for the Aug. 9 primary and 1st Congressional District special election at 8:30 a.m. Friday, July 29 in the Board of Commissioners meeting room.

After every statewide general election, precincts in every county are selected at random and elections officials there are required to recount those ballots by hand. Rice County, with a population of more than 68,000, if results deviate from standards set out in state law, ballots from additional precincts are hand counted. Should issues continue, all precincts are counted.

Maeda says that has not occurred since the process was instituted in 2016.

Additionally, the number of hand recounts needed has continued to drop, he said, demonstrating the accuracy of the voting machines, which he put at 99.9%.

"Hand counting is not as accurate," he said, noting that humans are more likely to err than machines.



Rice County Property Tax and Elections Director Denise Anderson, center, checks on a piece of voting equipment at the May 24, 2022 public accuracy test. Also pictured are Diane Sammon, left, and Brett Underdahl. (Rice County photo)

He also addressed concerns over electronic poll books used by voters to check in at their precinct. Those are not connected to voting machines, he said.

The Secretary of State's Office conducts a post-election review, looking at all of a particular county's election-related systems to ensure processes and state laws are being followed.

Anderson was among the first to volunteer for the review, earning praise from the Secretary of State's Office.

According to a memo from the office shared with commissioners in October 2021, "(Rice) County set a very high bar for the counties/cities/townships that followed. ... Kudos to county staff for ensuring the 2020 election was administered in a free, fair and secure manner."

### **Drop boxes and absentee ballots**

Commissioners discussed removing the drop boxes at the county Government Services Building following residents' concerns that they could be misused by people intent on disrupting the election process.

The boxes were installed in early 2020 after Rice County offices were closed due to COVID. They were intended to allow residents to deliver materials needed by county workers without the risk of coming in close contact with others, but as time wore on, Anderson said she and the county administrator realized voters would use the box on south side of the building as a ballot drop off.

Though the southside box was checked each weekday, County Attorney John Fossum said that there were no more than 20 ballots in the box when a pair of elections officials retrieved their contents.

Commissioners discussed the pros and cons of keeping the boxes, removing them all together or not accepting ballots dropped in the box. County staff will prepare a resolution for the board to consider during its June 28 meeting.

Contact:

Denise Anderson, Property Tax and Elections Director

[danderson@co.rice.mn.us](mailto:danderson@co.rice.mn.us)

507-332-6104

Suzy Rook, Communications Coordinator

[srook@co.rice.mn.us](mailto:srook@co.rice.mn.us)

507-384-6509