



January 27, 2026

The Honorable David C. Farnsworth, Chairman
Joint Legislative Budget Committee
Arizona State Senate
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

The Honorable David Livingston, Vice-Chairman
Joint Legislative Budget Committee
Arizona House of Representatives
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Chairman Farnsworth and Vice-Chairman Livingston:

Thank you for informing us that the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) is willing to review the \$650,000 portion of the Secretary of State's (SOS) CD7 transfer request related to temporary cybersecurity monitoring and active management.

Over the past three years, the SOS and JLBC have worked constructively together on budget line-item transfer requests. During that period, JLBC has provided positive reviews of each of the six JLBC review requests submitted by the SOS. We value that history of collaboration and JLBC's consistent, thoughtful oversight.

At the same time, the SOS must express extreme concern that limiting review to only this portion of the request leaves \$2.85 million in documented, time-sensitive election needs unfunded. As outlined in our December 24, 2025 submission and subsequent correspondence, the CD7 transfer request was structured as an integrated set of one-time, off-year investments necessary to ensure the security, operability, and credibility of Arizona's 2026 elections. Importantly, these investments would be funded using already-appropriated CD7 monies that would otherwise remain unspent and therefore do not require new appropriations or impact the state General Fund.

Accordingly, the SOS respectfully requests that JLBC amend the agenda for its January 29, 2026 meeting to include review of the full \$3.5 million CD7 transfer request. In the alternative, if JLBC is unable to take up the full request on January 29, the SOS respectfully requests that JLBC commit to reviewing the remaining \$2.85 million portion of the request at a subsequent

meeting no later than March 1, 2026, given statutory election timelines and the lead time required to implement these safeguards ahead of the 2026 election cycle.

Since January 2023, the SOS has requested approximately \$17 million in cybersecurity and IT funding to modernize and stabilize critical election systems. With the exception of limited one-time funds and federal grants, those requests have not been funded. This systemic underfunding significantly heightens the consequences of not authorizing the full \$3.5 million requested through the CD7 transfer.

In fact, the SOS has already taken significant cost-saving actions to operate within its constrained budget. Due to the loss of one-time flexible funding the SOS received in prior years, the SOS was forced in August 2025 to eliminate three senior positions after exhausting other cost-saving measures in an effort to maintain core services and reinvest in critical operational improvements. These reductions followed expense cuts, vacancy freezes, and internal reallocations, and they reflect difficult prioritization decisions rather than excess capacity.

This internal tightening underscores that the SOS cannot absorb the additional \$2.85 million in top election priorities within its existing budget without negatively impacting essential functions. As such, the remaining funding requested through the CD7 transfer is not discretionary but a necessary supplement to fulfill statutory obligations and prevent degradation of critical election services.

Without authorization to use the remaining \$2.85 million, the SOS will face unavoidable and material risks during the 2026 election cycle, including, but not limited to, the following:

- **EMS/ENR Programming and Resilience — \$300,000**

If funding is not provided, the State faces a high risk of failure or degradation of its Election Night Reporting (ENR) system. ENR is built on outdated code and operated by a single individual with the required technical and institutional knowledge. That individual is 71 years old, creating an unacceptable single point of failure. A system failure would require the SOS to manually compile results from more than three million ballots, dramatically increasing delays, error risk, and the spread of misinformation. The SOS has requested funding to replace ENR since 2024; this request represents a necessary stop-gap to responsibly administer the 2026 elections.

- **Rural County Ballot Tracking and Verification — \$250,000**

If funding is not provided, voters in Arizona's 13 rural counties will lack access to modern ballot-tracking and signature-curing tools. Without statewide deployment of BallotTrax and Text2Cure, voters will have limited visibility into whether their vote-by-mail ballots were received, verified, or counted, and many will be unable to cure signature issues electronically. County election offices—particularly in smaller jurisdictions—will face significantly increased administrative burdens, higher ballot-rejection rates, and reduced voter confidence.

- **Physical Security — \$400,000**

If funding is not provided, the Secretary of State will operate without adequate personal security despite a documented surge in credible threats against election officials. Violent threats against public servants—particularly in battleground states—have increased dramatically, and law enforcement has confirmed specific risks to the Secretary and his family. Recent attacks and credible threats targeting public officials nationally, including the assassination of Minnesota Steve Representative Melissa Hortman and Charlie Kirk, underscore the reality of this risk. JLBC approved comparable security funding in December 2024; denying it now would expose the Secretary and his family to unmitigated and unacceptable danger during the 2026 election cycle.

- **Reimbursement of County Recorders for FY2026 AVID Payments — \$1,000,000**

If funding is not provided, AVID will be unable to pay vendors and staff and may be forced to cease operations after March 1, 2026.

AVID operates under a cost-sharing model in which the State and Arizona's counties each pay 50 percent of operating costs. AVID's annual budget is \$2 million. The SOS was appropriated \$999,500 to cover the State's share of AVID FY26 operating costs. Those funds are exhausted.

For FY2026, counties adopted their budgets in reliance on explicit commitments made by members of the Senate Majority during the FY26 budget negotiations that excess funding in CD7 line item—already included in the SOS's FY2026 budget—would be made available to reimburse counties dollar-for-dollar for their approximately \$1 million share of AVID costs.

The SOS lacks statutory authority to compel counties to pay their AVID invoices, and prior experience demonstrates that some counties are unable or unwilling to do so. Without additional funding, the SOS will lack the resources necessary to operate AVID unless every county pays its invoice in full and on time—an outcome that cannot be assured. Any disruption in AVID operations would directly jeopardize Arizona's statewide voter registration system and the accuracy and integrity of voter registration records statewide.

- **Primary Election Logic and Accuracy (L&A) Testing — \$50,000**

If funding is not provided, the SOS will be unable to meet its statutory obligation under A.R.S. § 16-449 to conduct Logic and Accuracy testing of every voting system used in the 2026 primary election. Recent changes to the primary election timeline require these tests to occur in FY2026 and necessitate rapid statewide travel to all 15 counties. Without funding, voting systems may not be timely certified, jeopardizing the lawful conduct of the primary election.

- **Candidate Petition Signature Validation — \$50,000**

If funding is not provided, the SOS will be unable to timely validate candidate petition signatures for the 2026 election cycle. The compressed statutory review window requires temporary staffing, specialized tools, and supervisory oversight that cannot be absorbed by existing staff. Without

funding, delays and errors are likely, jeopardizing ballot candidate petition processing and preparation and increasing litigation risk.

- **Ballot Measure Initiative Signature Validation — \$100,000**

If funding is not provided, the SOS will be unable to meet statutory deadlines for validating initiative petition signatures submitted by July 2, 2026. This non-discretionary process requires specialized systems and a trained temporary workforce. Without funding, certification delays, elevated error rates, and litigation risk are likely, undermining public confidence in the initiative process.

- **County Elections Tabletop Exercises — \$150,000**

If funding is not provided, counties will enter the 2026 election cycle without the opportunity to rehearse coordinated responses to cyber incidents, bomb threats, equipment failures, or other high-impact disruptions. Given the loss of 176 years of county election leadership experience statewide, the absence of tabletop exercises will result in slower incident response, inconsistent decision-making, and greater public confusion during crises.

- **Additional County Elections Workers — \$250,000**

If funding is not provided, counties already facing staffing shortages will enter the 2026 election cycle without sufficient surge capacity to manage peak workloads. Processing delays, higher error rates, and staff burnout will increase, threatening the accuracy and sustainability of election operations statewide.

- **County Assistance Fund (IT and Election Administration Assistance) — \$100,000**

If funding is not provided, counties—particularly rural jurisdictions experiencing high turnover and limited IT capacity—will lack access to the technical and administrative support necessary to stabilize election operations during the 2026 cycle. The County Assistance Fund enables the SOS to deploy targeted IT support, on-site election administration assistance, and rapid-response “tiger teams” to address urgent issues and prevent operational bottlenecks. In 2024, these interventions were critical to mitigating security threats, workforce attrition, and system failures. Without this funding, counties will face increased risk of delays, inconsistent compliance, and preventable disruptions to voter registration and ballot processing.

While JLBC’s willingness to review the cybersecurity portion of the request is appreciated, review of that single component does not address the broader set of documented operational, voter-facing, and safety risks that remain unresolved. Consistent with JLBC’s prior positive review of each of the SOS’s transfer requests over the past three years, the SOS respectfully urges reconsideration of the decision not to review the full CD7 transfer request.

Given statutory election timelines and the lead time required to implement these safeguards, timely review of the remaining \$2.85 million—either through amendment of the January 29 agenda or at a subsequent meeting no later than March 1, 2026—is essential to allow the

Legislature and the SOS to continue working together, as they have in the past, to mitigate known risks using funds already appropriated for election-related purposes.

Thank you for your continued consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact Greg Ensell, Chief Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, at (480) 244-5130 or gensell@azsos.gov should you wish to discuss these concerns further.

Sincerely,



Adrian Fontes
Arizona Secretary of State

cc:

Legislative Leadership

JLBC Members

Richard Stavneak, Director, JLBC

Micaela Andrews, Assistant Director, JLBC

Ben Henderson, Director, OSPB