

# JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

175 Arsenal St., 1st Floor  
Watertown, NY 13601  
Phone: (315) 785-3027  
[votejefferson.com](http://votejefferson.com)

Democratic Commissioner

**Michelle R. LaFave**

[mlafave@co.jefferson.ny.us](mailto:mlafave@co.jefferson.ny.us)

Deputy Commissioner

**Deborah L. Matthews**

[dmatthews@co.jefferson.ny.us](mailto:dmatthews@co.jefferson.ny.us)



Republican Commissioner

**Jude R. Seymour**

[jseymour@co.jefferson.ny.us](mailto:jseymour@co.jefferson.ny.us)

Deputy Commissioner

**Margaret E. Meier**

[mmeier@co.jefferson.ny.us](mailto:mmeier@co.jefferson.ny.us)

To: Jefferson County legislators and County Administrator Robert Hagemann

From: Commissioners LaFave and Seymour

Date: Feb. 5, 2024

Re: 2023 Annual Report

---

The cornerstone of modern elections was built by our predecessors in 2008, when Jefferson County adopted full-time commissioners and bought a fleet of Dominion ImageCast Precinct scanners and ballot marking devices.

Through rigorous and repeated testing and auditing, we know those Dominion tabulators produced results that accurately reflected the will of the electorate.

That did not mean the 2008 technology and parts in those machines would last forever.

The commissioners, with the support of several county departments, developed a process for choosing the 2.0 fleet. They and the two machine technicians met with all four certified vendors – Clear Ballot, Dominion, ES&S Hart Intercivic – to see their machines up close and ask numerous questions about their ballot design software, their security and their rigor.

The culmination of that process was an August budget request to replace our entire Dominion offering with Clear Ballot's ClearMark and ClearCast machines. We were thrilled when the budget director recommended funding the replacement fleet and the Legislature approved it a few months later.

The 2023 elections – a June primary and a November general election - were therefore the last hurrah for our “teenagers,” as we were prone to calling the 1.0 batch. They helped

voters decide among 217 distinct candidates in 143 distinct contests on the village, town and county levels of government.

With new county legislative district lines going into effect in 2024, the commissioners took the opportunity to re-evaluate our operations. We trimmed the number of election districts from 70 to 65 and put six poll sites on “pause” as we evaluated their use in the modern era.

Through legislation, the state Legislature has greatly expanded access to voting. While casting a ballot was predominantly done in a 15-hour window on a single Tuesday as late as 2018, voting can now be accomplished in many ways – and over many days.

With the creation of “early vote by mail” – which goes into effect in 2024 – registered voters now have the opportunity to vote up to 45 days before any election without needing to provide an excuse. We anticipate that this will further diminish the desire of some to appear personally to cast their ballot, since it can be done at their convenience (and without cost) from their home.

Having said that, we heard from several people – from ordinary citizens to our elected officials – about the poll site “pauses” and the effect they thought it would have on the poor, elderly and disabled.

As a response, we piloted a “vote center” in Ellisburg in 2023 which allowed those living outside the two villages to vote at the town site most convenient to them – Ellisburg Town Office and Mannsville Fire Department. We expect to expand that offering to the city of Watertown in 2024, so that city residents can cast a vote on Election Day at the site most convenient to their work or home. These sort of voter-friendly efficiencies are possible because of cellular connectivity among our electronic poll books.

Speaking of the state Legislature, they continued to make election reform a top priority in 2023, passing 24 new bills. Governor Hochul signed all but two into law, including:

- Amending the voter registration cutoff to 10 days before an election instead of the previous 25, creating a “golden day” in which a county resident could register and vote on the first day of early voting.
- Creating “Early Vote by Mail,” a mechanism for a voter to apply for a ballot without providing an excuse for why they cannot come to the polls.
- Moving most, but not all, local elections to even-numbered years, starting in 2025.
- Establishing a training institute and developing curriculum for a certified poll worker training program.
- Adjusting the 150 Assembly Districts throughout New York state.

An additional 28 bills passed either the Assembly or Senate; many remain priorities for the Democratic-led legislature in 2024.

Our board continues to support the registration of county residents by providing registration forms to libraries, post offices and municipal offices. Several county agencies, including the DMV, Office for the Aging and the Department of Social Services, help their clients fill out applications, which we also process.

Commissioners LaFave and Seymour, as well as Helen Fikes, our machine technician, visited government classes at Watertown and General Brown high schools to talk to seniors about registering, applying for an absentee ballot and working as poll inspectors. The commissioners also accepted invites from civic organizations such as the American Association of University Women to answer voter questions about their ballot.

When our board isn't administering elections, we're working endlessly on making sure all the individuals on our registration rolls are still eligible to vote here. As individuals die, move, or change their legal name every day, it is a constant effort to keep the list well maintained. We have invested in some tools we think can help us better track these migrations and help keep confidence high in our elections.

We greatly appreciate the Legislature's willingness to properly fund elections, and we look forward to ongoing discussions about the next investments – including the upcoming end-of-life for our electronic poll books.