



King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

Annual Report
For the Year 2023

Feb 1, 2024

**King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee
Membership**

Member

Eliseo J. Juárez
Jude Ahmed
Mathew Patrick Thomas
Christopher Hays
Hillary De La Cruz
Hanna Floss
Tyson Hartman
Stuart Holmes
Julie Kang
Kathy Sakahara
Mike Flood
Dr. Jason Lambacher
Stanley Tsao
Matthew Vinci
VACANT
VACANT

Representing

Chair, Spanish-Speaking Community
Vice Chair, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Vice Chair, King County Republican Party
Registered Voter
Registered Voter
King County Democratic Party
Technology
Washington State Office of Secretary of State
Korean-Speaking Community
League of Women Voters
Municipal League of King County
University of Washington Bothell
Chinese-Speaking Community
Jurisdictional
Vietnamese-Speaking Community
Disability Community

Introduction

Authorized in King County Code Section 2.53, the Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee (CEOC) is dedicated to helping Martin Luther King Jr. County maintain public confidence in elections. Per the King County Code, the CEOC makes recommendations to the King County Council to:

- Improve performance of the Department of Elections; and
- Help ensure that accountability and performance of the Department of Elections is provided in a transparent manner that is meaningful to the residents of King County.

As mentioned in the 2021 and 2022 CEOC Annual Reports, the CEOC and its members serve the public and the King County Council (hereafter referred to as KCC or Council) by making recommendations and reporting to the Council to maintain public confidence. The CEOC also serves as an important source of guidance and information for King County Council. As such, this report is submitted pursuant to King County Code 2.53.041.5, which requires the CEOC to submit an annual report to the Council on its "observations, findings and recommendations regarding the special, primary, and general elections."

Committee Highlights

The CEOC met 6 times in 2023, exceeding the requirement specified in the ordinance that established the committee and provided observers at most elections held in King County during the year. Additionally, workgroups of the CEOC convened an additional 12 times with members conducting issue specific work. As in 2022, the CEOC adopted an entirely virtual meeting calendar compliant with both the Open Public Meetings Act and guidance around COVID-19 protocols. As pandemic restrictions eased earlier in 2023, the CEOC affirmed its commitment to virtual meeting format to increase public access and participation of CEOC members regardless of physical location. The only non-virtual CEOC activities were observations conducted at Ballot Box locations and the Department of Elections facility in Renton. Additionally, some CEOC members participated in a fieldtrip to K&H Integrity Communications (K&H) in Everett, WA in July. King County Elections hires K&H for its printing needs. In comparison to pre-pandemic meeting attendance from CEOC members, the shift to all virtual meetings and business increased CEOC attendance and reduced the travel inequities for members commuting to the Department of Elections.

In contrast to 2022, the past year has had fewer CEOC seats vacant and less turnover. The committee is particularly proud of its work to increase CEOC member satisfaction, meaningful work, and access to participation in the all-volunteer board. In a highly politicized context of election rhetoric, election skepticism at the national level, and election misinformation, the CEOC membership has stabilized and the average tenure of CEOC members enhances the recommendations and guidance we provide the Council. The challenge of operating CEOC without full membership remains. Of particular concern is the length of time the CEOC had been operating without a member of the Vietnamese Speaking community and of a Junior Taxing Authority. The CEOC is especially vulnerable without representation from members representing communities with language barriers.

A Focus on Public Confidence and Oversight

For 2023, the CEOC implemented a workplan that better serves the Council, Department of Elections and public. As mentioned in the 2022 Annual Report, the CEOC evaluation of its role in maintaining confidence in elections was allocated into work groups to explore, learn, and provide recommendations to Council related to each area of charge. These groups were led by CEOC Vice Chairs and focused into the following three workgroups:

- Election Monitoring, Vice Chair Mathew Patrick Thomas
- Best Practices, Vice Chair Jayson Todd Morris
- Voter Participation, Vice Chair Jude Ahmed

Progress on 2023 CEOC Commitments

Members of the Committee committed to Council to undertake work related to four specific areas of concern. These commitments were specifically established to create greater public confidence in the work of the Elections Department and increase the amount of information available to King County residents about the work of King County Elections. The commitments and our progress are outlined below:

Commitment #1 Increase CEOC members' election and Canvassing Board observing program.

Status: Complete/In Progress

The CEOC continues to see year over year increases in elections observation. The Election Monitoring Workgroup in particular had placed special emphasis on participating in election observations throughout 2023. However, the CEOC affirmed its commitment to this specific task by requiring training of all members and the launch of the CEOC elections monitoring calendar would launch in 2024 allowing members to sign-up and coordinate observation activities.

Commitment #2 Restructuring CEOC reporting and bylaws to better inform Council and residents of the county of its work.

Status: In Progress

CEOC launched workgroups to address specific areas of concern and provide recommendations to Council. This work's next iteration will include examination of the role of Vice-Chairs and identity-based seats on CEOC with recommendations to Council in 2024.

Commitment #3 Creating an Election Excellence Dashboard for the Council to see how the performance of King County Elections compares to best and emerging practices across the country with related recommendations for the Council to consider.

Status: In Progress

CEOC is examining core areas of measurement on what areas of excellence constitute an Elections Department that has public confidence, operates with best practices, and is accountable to King County residents. The CEOC recognizes that the Department of Elections, Director Julie Wise, and her staff are nationally known leaders in election administration and excellence, the CEOC workgroups will identify core areas to highlight how King County Elections strives to achieve, meets, or exceeds these areas of excellence.

Commitment #4 Examining special junior taxing district elections as an area of critical recommendation in 2023 for the Council.

Status: In Progress

CEOC has committed two meeting agendas to look at special and junior taxing district election recommendations. With the appointment of a CEOC member representing this issue area, CEOC will make a recommendation in the 2024 report related to this topic.

CEOC Recommendation to Council

The CEOC is formally recommending a change to the county code to increase public oversight of elections. In 2023 a series of technical and process anomalies during a 2023 Election presented a process improvement the CEOC seeks from Council.

The anomalies did not affect in any way the counting, outcome, or validity of the election. Appropriate safeguards and processes were in place to ensure accurate ballot processing and accurate tabulation. However, the event dictated mandatory notification to the two major political parties outlining the event and remedy. This process/policy is outlined in state law and can be found in [RCW 29A.12.130](#), [RCW 29A.40.100](#), and [WAC 434.261.020](#).

It is essential that non-interested parties are given this same notification. The role of the CEOC is particularly well suited to receive this notification within the responsibilities granted by the Council. Specifically, designating the CEOC as a notified organization per [RCW 29A.12.130](#), [RCW 29A.40.100](#), and [WAC 434.261.020](#) allows CEOC to fully exercise its oversight function on behalf of the Council.

Elements of this recommendation have already been adopted by the King County Elections Department as a department procedure. We are encouraged by the recent update in KCE Department policy effective as of Sept. 7, 2023 which makes this change. The policy, “**Observing at King County Elections Building - Secure Processing Area 300-POL**”; came at the request of the CEOC to the Elections Director and was implemented swiftly after the request.

While the internal policy is an important step, it is the recommendation of the CEOC to change county code to ensure policy consistency, even in the event of a new director taking office and, in any instances, where parties are notified of these types of events, the CEOC is included in that process as an oversight body and accountable to public, not political parties.

This recommendation comes as CEOC members have increased observations of the Risk Limiting Audit during the 2023 Primary Election. This is a statistical audit that ensures the accuracy of the election results. King County Elections voluntarily performs this audit for each election in addition to a random batch audit. Another committee member observed at King County Election Headquarters on Aug 1st, and two committee members attended on October 12th the mandatory Logic and Accuracy Test of the tabulation systems which took place prior to the 2023 General Election. CEOC found there were no issues to report.

Conclusion

The CEOC plays a unique and important role in King County and Washington state. A rarity amongst counties in Washington, the CEOC is the only local body of its kind statewide. The partnership between CEOC, Director Wise and the Department of Elections cannot be overstated. The cooperation and spirit of transparency between the Department and CEOC makes oversight

possible. King County Elections has been responsive to every request for time, documents, and collaboration.

The CEOC wishes to express its deep appreciation for the partnership offered by Director Wise, the work of the intrepid public servants of the Elections Department, and the expert Council staff supporting CEOC operations. As stated in our previous reports, King County is well served by its award winning, and nationally acclaimed Elections Department under the leadership of Director Wise. We are confident in its operations and have full faith in the validity of King County Elections to be accurate, fair, and true.

CEOC is eager to continue our work on behalf of King County. Thank you for the opportunity to serve our communities.

In Service,
Eliseo J. Juárez
Chair