

**Interview with Alan Hays, Lake County Supervisor of Elections,
On the State of Election Security in Lake County, FL**

League of Women Voters Villages/Tri-County Chapter member Jane Hepting interviewed Lake County, Florida Supervisor of Elections Alan Hays on February 11, 2026.

NOTE: Direct quotes are indicated with quotation marks.

1. How do you ensure only citizens vote?

There are many safeguards in place. The process begins with the voter registration system. Anyone who wants to register to vote must complete an application under oath and affirm US citizenship. The application warns of the felony penalties for false statements. Every application is reviewed by the Florida Division of Elections, which checks the eligibility of each applicant. If the Division of Elections suspects that the applicant is not a citizen or is ineligible for any other reason, the Division directs the SOE to notify the applicant that his or her application has been rejected. The applicant then has the right to submit evidence of eligibility, which is sent to the Division for further review.

2. How do you ensure mail-in voting is safe?

“Our office and the voter can track their ballot as it makes its way through the system using the Ballot Trax. This will alert the voter if they choose. Once we have possession of the ballot, it is safeguarded, verified by both human and machines processes checking the signature. It is only opened under the guidance of a canvassing board member and processed into a high-speed tallying machine. All these processes are open to public viewing. We also use a separate stand-alone auditing machine to verify results.” The canvassing board is composed, by state statute, of a county court judge, the chair of the county commission, and the Supervisor of Elections unless he or she is running for office. Voting by mail is very safe and is a wonderful convenience for voters with limited mobility or long working hours. There are five states which conduct their entire election by mail.

3. How do you ensure machines aren't hacked?

“We do a pre-election L&A testing that includes several diagnostics as well as a pre-marked test deck to verify the machine is properly reading. It is never hooked to an internet network. The communications that the machine has is a one-way transmission. The ballots are also fed through the same stand-alone machine as the VBM ballots to verify that the voting machines are recording properly. There are checks and balances.”

4. How do you ensure people don't vote more than once?

Our system talks back and forth to each other. This allows almost instant notification of when a voter votes to be registered in all data locations. The system will not allow additional check-ins of the same voter.” So, if someone votes in person and then sends in a mail-in ballot, the mail-in-ballot will be rejected. Florida used to participate in the inter-state services of the

Election Registration Information Center (ERIC) which reported if people voted in two different states. Governor DeSantis' administration cancelled this membership in 2023.

5. How do you ensure every legitimate ballot is counted?

"We audit every data point possible to make sure we balance with voter check-ins to ballots cast." Every ballot is read by two different machines. If the tallies do not match – often due to a stray mark on the ballot -- the problem ballot is found and shown to the Canvassing Board, which determines the final tally.

6. What is the percentage of votes cast by non-citizens or are invalid for other reasons?

Supervisor Hays knows of only one case in Lake County where a non-citizen voted. A high school student registered during a high school registration drive and may have felt embarrassed to admit he was not a citizen. Later, the young man admitted his mistake and asked to be removed from the voter registration rolls.

7. What kinds of invalid voting happens in your county?

Sometimes the Florida Division of Elections approves the registration of a felon who still owes a fine or court costs. Tallahassee needs to create a system which can tell felons how much they owe. Sometimes felons register to vote, believing all fines and costs have been paid.

8. What happens if a vote is invalid?

If a mail-in ballot is rejected because it is not signed or the signature doesn't match our records, we notify the voter and given him or her an opportunity to fix the problem. If a voter wants to vote in person but an eligibility issue exists, the voter can complete a provisional ballot, and the Canvassing Board will decide if the ballot can be counted.

9. Can a person be purged without being notified? "No. A voter on the way to removal is notified before they are placed in the inactive status. They are then inactive for 2 more federal elections before being removed."

Supplemental Information from Jane Hepting:

The interview and the Supervisors of Elections (SOE) office website reflect his commitment to fair elections.

His office website proclaims: "The office is dedicated to the impartial administration of Florida's elections laws and in conducting fair, accurate, and honest elections." During the interview, Supervisor Hays stated that he wants every eligible voter to register and every registered voter to vote. He has served as SOE for over nine years and he takes pride in the fact that almost 90% of Lake County's registered voters cast a vote in the 2024 presidential election.

Voter can use the website to see if their address is correct, where their polling place is, and whether their ballot was counted. Supervisor Hays makes sure that poll workers are from different political parties at each voting site. His poll workers are trained and take an oath to endeavor to prevent all fraud, deceit, or abuse in conducting the election. To maintain the public trust, ballots are counted in rooms with large windows so the observers can watch the entire process. He laments that so much misinformation is spread on social media attacking the integrity of elections. He often lectures at public events on the many steps his office takes to ensure fair elections.