LOCAL NEWS

Election security updates shared at La Grange Area League of Women Voters forum



Curt Handsman, co-president of the La Grange Area League of Women Voters, speaks about election security Oct. 13, 2026, during a forum at the La Grange Park Public Library. (Hank Beckman/for Pioneer Press)

By **HANK BECKMAN** | For the Daily Southtown

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About 40 residents came out to the La Grange Park Public Library last week to hear updates on measures being taken to secure elections.

The La Grange Area League Women Voters forum Oct. 13 included information from Cook County officials, including who is eligible to vote, how to register, how to vote by mail and procedures for early voting.

LWV member Laurie Sinden, organizer of the event, said she wasn't particularly worried about election security, "but I know people are, and there's so much disinformation, misinformation, out there that we thought it was good to have someone at the center of it really talk about the reality of it."

Edmund Michalowski, deputy clerk of elections for Cook County, sought to assure those present there was no concern regarding the security of Illinois elections.

"Our elections are so secure that even the laptops that we use to plug in the information from the voting equipment has to be secure and has to be standard," Michalowski said.

"If there's 800 people that checked in and only 400 ballots, well something happened, right? Where are the other 400 ballots? We would look in the machine, maybe the scanner was down, and we'd come to terms as to where everything is."

Although there is no identification required at the polling place, Michalowski said the law requires signatures match those given when the person first registered.

He also said when ballots are left in a drop box or sent by mail, a computer scanner reads a barcode on the ballot that pulls up the original signature in the system, comparing it to the signature required on the exterior of the ballot.

"Right now, we have two weeks after Election Day where you can count a mail ballot if it was postmarked by Election Day," he said. "If it's postmarked by Election Day, it's valid. People try to test test us all the time."

One longtime election judge said she was concerned about verifying signatures at a polling place.

“I can say that the signature issue is a real conundrum, because, obviously, we have an aging population, and people come in and they have Parkinson’s and the E poll books are hard to write on, especially if they’re left handed,” she said. “So it’s really difficult at times to decipher.”

She said judges look for the first letters of each name, but that is also problematic.

“I’ve even had students who have come in and said, ‘we don’t know how to write cursive,'” she said.



Cook County Deputy Clerk of Elections Edmund Michalowski addresses a La Grange Area League of Women Voters forum on election security Oct. 13, 2026, at the La Grange Park Public Library. (Hank Beckman/for Pioneer Press)

Michalowski said if signatures appear drastically different, judges can ask for identification.

“My signature certainly has changed since I was eligible to vote, maybe 60 years ago or whatever. But the poll books now will allow people to update their signature as well,” he said.

When an audience member expressed concern about an election being "hacked," Michalowski said an advantage of the state having a decentralized election system is that "you would have to hack 108 different entities in Illinois to affect anything. If somebody downstate has their poll booked hacked, it doesn't mean we would."

Another audience member asked about ranked choice voting, which Michalowksi said would be difficult to implement.

"Ranked choice voting is a buzzword that a lot of people are using," he said.

Ranked choice voting elsewhere in the country works by voters ranking candidates in the order they prefer. If one candidate is the first choice of more than 50% of voters in the first round of counting, that person is the winner.

But if no candidate surpasses 50%, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and voters who chose that candidate as their top pick have their votes redistributed to their next choice. This process continues, with the candidate who gets the fewest votes being eliminated until someone emerges with a majority.

But Michalowksi said that would not happen in Illinois until there's a statute changing the law for the entire state, and adopting standards to determine that each election authority and all election equipment can correctly count such votes.

"When we think about ranked choice voting, we have to think about doing it the right way," he said. "When when you think about doing it the right way, there are 102 counties in Illinois, and there are six independent election administrations."

But Michalowski said he saw no groundswell for ranked choice voting in Illinois.

For more information about elections in Cook County, go to the county clerk's web site, cookcountyclerk.com.

Hank Beckman is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.

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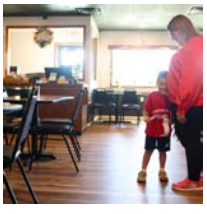
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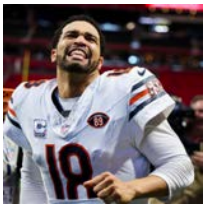
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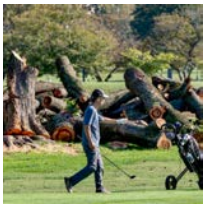
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