



**Ottawa County**  
Clerk | Register of Deeds

Justin F. Roebuck  
County Clerk | Register of Deeds

Renee E. Kuiper  
Chief Deputy County Clerk

Rachel A. Sanchez  
Chief Deputy Register of Deeds

January 20, 2023

Sophie Lehman  
Associate Director – U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence

**By Email Delivery:**

Dear Sophie and Team,

It is with regret that I inform you of my decision to remove the Ottawa County Clerk's Office from consideration for membership in the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence Centers for Election Excellence program.

This is not a decision which I have taken lightly, acknowledging the considerable time and energy that your team has invested in the conversation and deliberation leading to our selection as finalists for the program this past November.

However, in the weeks following the announcement of the program finalists, I have become more aware of the grant funding component of the program. After a great deal of research and thought from me and our team, I have decided that the best decision for our election operation and for our community is to remove ourselves from consideration for the Centers for Election Excellence partnership.

When our team applied for selection as an inaugural Center for Election Excellence, what energized me the most was the possibility of true collaborative partnerships, both amongst fellow election officials and also with a remarkable group of nonprofit organizations. We were so excited to join a working group of dedicated individuals with the goal of crafting a set of standards for world class election administration. I remain genuinely thankful for the objectives of the Alliance when it comes to this critically needed work.

However, after our selection as a finalist organization, our team learned that a significant amount of private funding was planned to be distributed to election administration offices that were a part of the Alliance. Upon being notified of this generous grant, I asked that no funds be distributed until we had the time to research and fully think through the acceptance of private grant dollars and what that would ultimately mean for the confidence of our community in the election process.

I strongly believe that there is a critical need for better funding in election administration. The demands of administering elections with integrity and access for all voters require a deeper investment than our federal, state, and local governments have historically given, and many local election officials across the country face the challenge of chronic underfunding. However, I fundamentally believe that it is the responsibility of our federal, state and local governments to make this investment. I have serious concerns when, in the absence of government investment, individuals and private foundations pick up the slack.

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This funding from private sources, no matter how well intentioned, can ultimately cast a shadow over public trust in the process, particularly when the resources given can be tied to individuals or groups who have also contributed to political parties or candidates.

Public trust is fundamental to everything we do, not only in elections but in all aspects of our office. We cannot risk jeopardizing that trust by accepting a partnership, however well-intentioned, that is based primarily on grant dollars from private individuals who may or may not have a political or economic interest in the outcome of elections.

I remain sincerely grateful to the Alliance for your consideration of our team as a Center for Election Excellence. I hope that we continue to see an increased awareness of the need for strong standards of excellence in election administration, and that the governments responsible for funding our elections will be engaged to provide the resources necessary to the success of this critical work.

Sincerely,

Justin F. Roebuck  
Ottawa County Clerk | Register of Deeds