

**Testimony of Christopher M. Thomas, Michigan Director of Elections, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration on April 9, 2014.**

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Chairman, Committee on Rules and Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Schumer:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee on Rules and Administration concerning the Report issued by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA). Specifically, I have been asked to comment on the sections of the Report addressing the impact of the motor/voter provision of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), being Sec. 1973gg-3 Simultaneous application for voter registration and application for motor vehicle driver's license.

My career in election administration began in 1974, and I have served as Michigan's Director of Elections since 1981. I currently work for Secretary of State Ruth Johnson, who sends her regards to the members of the Committee. Today the PEW Charitable Trust will release its third Elections Performance Report showing Michigan as a high-performing state. Our success is due in large part to a high-functioning motor/voter program. Michigan has a highly decentralized election system with over 1,500 voter registration jurisdictions.

I come from one of two states that have fully implemented the motor/voter provisions of the NVRA, the other state being Delaware. I am fortunate to be on the same panel today with Ms. Elaine Manlove, Delaware State Election Commissioner, who will provide you with details of their excellent program.

In 1975, Michigan enacted the first in the nation motor/voter program. Secretary of State Richard H. Austin proposed this program to provide the citizens of Michigan with a more effective way to register to vote. Michigan voters and drivers are by and large the very same people. Secretary Austin thought it made imminent sense to offer our citizens the opportunity to submit a voter registration application at the same time they were applying for or updating their driver licenses. Consistently more than 80% of the total registration transactions each year are handled in Michigan by the motor/voter program administered by the secretary of state. The success of Michigan's program was, in part, responsible for the motor/voter provisions of the NVRA.

I had the honor of serving as a commissioner on the PCEA under the leadership of two outstanding co-chairs, Mr. Robert Bauer and Mr. Benjamin Ginsberg. The Commission was not charged with developing a legislative agenda; consequently we did not offer one. Our findings and recommendations were unanimous and generally have been well-received. I am not advocating for any legislative initiatives coming from the recommendations of the "The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration" (PCEA Report). However, I am recommending for your consideration H.R. 2115, sponsored by the Honorable Candice Miller, Chair of the Committee on House Administration,

which addresses a needed enhancement to the NVRA, but was not commented on by the PCEA.

One of the topics considered and addressed by the PCEA was the performance of departments of motor vehicles (DMV) in the execution of their responsibilities under the NVRA. Our conclusion that the DMVs have not fully implemented the motor/voter provisions is based on data published in the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's 2012 Election Administration and Voting Survey (EVAS) and testimony received at public hearings. The Report concludes

"DMVs, which are supposed to play the most important registration role in the statute, are the weakest link in the system. Some DMVs appear to disregard the law. Others erect impediments to the seamless transfer of registration data to election offices managing statewide registration lists. This noncompliance leads to preventable inaccuracies in the voter registration lists. Voters who think they registered or updated their address at the DMV show up at polling locations only to find out they are not registered or are in the wrong polling location." (PCEA Report, page 17)

I have attached the PCEA Report findings and recommendations concerning administration of the motor/voter programs as Attachment #1.

The PCEA's conclusions are based on data reported by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in the 2012 Election and Voting Survey and testimony presented at public hearings. The data for 2012 demonstrates that two states have fully implemented motor/voter and only 7 have made adequate progress toward full implementation; DC, GA, KY, NY, PA, RI, & UT: See Attachment #2: "Total Forms Received – Motor Vehicle Offices." This chart shows 1) the number of voter registration transactions from DMVs and 2) the percent DMV transactions represent of total voter registration transactions in each state. My conclusion is that states with less than 50% of their total transactions generated by DMVs have not fully implemented the motor/voter provisions of the NVRA.

The PCEA Report takes a strong position on this topic because when motor/voter is not properly administered there are negative consequences to the election day experience of voters. Likewise when there is a well-functioning motor/voter program the integrity of the voter registration file is enhanced and voters experience fewer problems on election day. I offer the following considerations for a well-functioning motor/voter program:

- The beauty of motor/voter is that it cuts across all political and socio-economic strata. There is no other voter registration program that serves such a large and diverse segment of the population. Motor/voter programs offer voter registration to both driver license applicants and state personal identification card applicants. For example 75% of voters who are recipients of public assistance in Michigan registered to vote through the motor/voter program administered by the Secretary of State.

- Every voter registration application coming through a DMV is from a person who has had a face-to-face transaction where both identification and legal presence are verified. This is a built-in verification that benefits the integrity of the election process.
- Because approximately 75% of annual motor/voter registration transactions are changes of address, each transaction is both a registration in a new location and a cancellation in the former location of residence. The voter registration file accurately reflects where the voters currently reside. When the file inaccurately reflects voter actual residence, mail lists are likewise inaccurate causing a huge waste of money by those using the lists to send campaign literature and other materials.
- When voter registration files do not reflect the current residence, the number of provisional ballots cast on election day increases. Provisional ballots cause longer wait times to vote, create a bad election day experience for voters and cause extra work for election officials on election day and the days immediately following an election. When motor/voter is properly working, the number of provisional ballots dramatically decreases. For example, Ohio had over 200,000 provisional ballots in 2012, most of which were cast because of address updates were not made prior to the election. By comparison, Michigan had 2,675 provisional ballots. If the Ohio motor/voter program, which only generated 14% of the total transactions in 2012, was fully implemented the vast majority of their provisional ballots would disappear.

Delaware rather than Michigan is highlighted in the Report because Delaware's elections and motor vehicle programs are administered by two different agencies and the motor/voter solution does not require integration into the motor vehicle computer system. One advantage Michigan has is that the Secretary of State is both the chief election officer and motor vehicle administrator, which makes implementation of motor/voter much less complicated. There is no question that DMVs have demanding missions and huge workloads that are supported by complex computer systems. Further, many of these complex computer systems are currently involved in 'modernization' projects. Integrating motor/voter into existing computer systems is difficult. Delaware has sidestepped the difficulty of integrating systems by transmitting voter registration data from the e-signature interface (credit card-style signature device) directly to the state voter registration database, which requires very little integration with their DMV system. Delaware has paved the way for any state where elections and motor vehicle administration are managed by two different agencies (nearly every other state) to implement the NVRA mandate at a lower cost and in a shorter time period after work begins.

Twenty states have adopted online voter registration programs as another avenue for voters to become registered and update their records. As the PCEA Report notes, there is potential for states to use online voter registration programs to implement NVRA motor/voter mandates. Similar to the Delaware process, online voter registration offers an easier and lower cost solution over full scale integration into DMV legacy software.

On March 27 and 28, 2014, the PEW Charitable Trust, Election Initiative Program hosted a discussion with the election directors and motor vehicle directors from more than 30 states. The topic of the conference was increasing the participation by DMVs in the voter registration process. There was a good exchange of challenges involved in moving to full compliance and excellent presentations on possible avenues that minimize the difficulties. The American Association Motor Vehicle Administrators and the National Association State Election Directors will continue to work together with the PEW Charitable Trust on takeaways from the conference.

In conclusion, I believe better motor/voter performance through full compliance with the NVRA will substantially enhance the accuracy of voter registration files and improve the election day experience for many voters. With lower cost implementation strategies it may be more feasible for DMVs to fulfill both the letter and spirit of the NVRA. I know that state election officials across the country stand ready to assist in this objective.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not recommend your consideration of H.R. 2115, which seeks to keep registration files more accurate by removing voters from the state voter registration file when they move to a new state. When a driver moves to another state, the DMV in the new state of residence makes sure the former state of residence is notified that the driver is now licensed in the new state. H.R. 2115 would require the DMV of the new state to ask the driver/voter whether the new state will be the state of residence for voting purposes. If the driver answers 'Yes' that information would be transmitted to the former state and the older voter registration would be canceled. Approximately 100,000 Michigan residents move to another state each year and are issued a driver license in their new state of residence. Under the NVRA it can take from 3 to 5 years before these old registrations can be removed from the file. H.R. 2115 offers an opportunity to keep the voter registration file current based on information provided by the voter. See Attachment #3: Testimony of Christopher M. Thomas before the Committee on House Administration on June 4, 2013.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Report of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration.

## **ATTACHMENT 1**

**Excerpts from the Presidential Commission on Election Administration Report  
“The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the  
Presidential Commission on Election Administration”**

**Excerpts from the Presidential Commission on Election Administration Report “The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration” (Endnotes omitted.)**

However, the election statute most often ignored, according to testimony the Commission received, is the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA or “Motor Voter”). Designed to assist prospective voters by facilitating registration, the statute requires Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMVs) and public assistance agencies to provide registration materials and to ensure that their customers have the opportunity to register to vote. By all accounts, states vary considerably in the degree to which such agencies register voters and transfer registration data to election administrators. (Also, as evidenced by the biennial NVRA report issued by the EAC, several states are unable to account for the source for many, if not most, of their new registrations.)

DMVs, which are supposed to play the most important registration role in the statute, are the weakest link in the system. Some DMVs appear to disregard the law. Others erect impediments to the seamless transfer of registration data to election offices managing statewide registration lists. This noncompliance leads to preventable inaccuracies in the voter registration lists. Voters who think they registered or updated their address at the DMV show up at polling locations only to find out they are not registered or are in the wrong polling location.

The DMVs do not shoulder all of the blame; the other public assistance agencies required by the NVRA to register voters also often fail to comply with the law. Disability rights groups identified the lack of voting assistance available at state offices for the disabled. Military advocates offer similar criticisms of recruitment centers. As assistance agencies shift their client services to online channels, compliance with the NVRA often drops further because voter registration is left out of the online portals and website designs of these agencies.

When the NVRA was passed two decades ago, the revolution in data sharing and integration was just beginning. Now, Americans experience every day a world in which data-sharing is commonplace and expected. Indeed, the challenge of data-sharing envisioned and required by the NVRA — principally, exchanging names and addresses between agencies — pales in comparison to most modern-day data integration challenges. However, by all accounts, the root of many registration difficulties occurs at the point where one agency receiving a registration form or updated address fails to transmit that information accurately and seamlessly with the voter registration database held by the election authority.

PCEA Report, pp. 17-18.

**Recommendation: States should seamlessly integrate voter data acquired through Departments of Motor Vehicles with their statewide voter registration lists.**

The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), known in each state as the agency issuing driver’s licenses and state personal identification cards, plays a pivotal role in the registration of America’s voters. As a critical actor in the creation and maintenance of each state’s voter registration file, the DMV can also contribute to the degree of orderliness and efficiency of operation in each community’s polling places on Election Day. The NVRA, enacted more than 20 years ago, mandates that each state’s DMV offer an opportunity to register to vote for every

citizen applying for a driver's license or state personal identification card or changing an address on one of those documents. If there is any identification document that citizens will keep current, it is the state-issued driver's license or personal identification card. Universally, this NVRA program, commonly known as "Motor Voter," is embraced across political party lines because such a wide swath of the American electorate frequents these offices on a regular basis.

Yet the data compiled biennially by the EAC reflect poorly on the efficacy of Motor Voter. Significantly less than one-third of new registrations are processed through motor vehicle departments. Only seven states and the District of Columbia report total motor vehicle department registrations accounting for more than 50 percent of the total registrations received in the 2011-2012 election cycle. The low level of participation by DMVs leaves no doubt that Motor Voter is not working as intended.

Delaware and Michigan have designed systems that seamlessly integrate the Motor Voter transaction into the DMV driver's license application program in such a manner as to keep a large number of voter records current and to save the DMV money in reduced staff time committed to this program. The Delaware DMV Director and the Election Commissioner together developed an interface called "e-signature." It began because of the number of voters who appeared at polling places believing they had registered at the DMV, but were not on the voter rolls. When citizens go to the DMV for driver's license services, they provide their information to the DMV clerk. By following a script on their computer screen, the DMV clerks now ask citizens if they would like to register to vote or update their information if they are already registered. They view their information on a screen that is also a credit card-style signature device. On that screen, voters certify that they are citizens, select their party affiliations and sign the forms. All of this information is then transmitted in real-time to the Department of Elections for the voter's county. The election office no longer processes registration applications from the DMV by hand. All information is now entered and transmitted electronically, saving time every day and especially on Election Days.

An improperly functioning DMV can naturally lead to Election Day confusion. Voters who appear at their polling place after moving can find that their voter registration records have not been updated to conform to their new driver's license addresses. As a result, a greater number of provisional ballots are cast, leading to congestion in the polling place and unnecessary post-election verification work for county and local election officials. In other states, the voters are directed to their old polling places to vote, which may be located in another jurisdiction within the state. *The Commission strongly recommends that states follow the Delaware model and adopt procedures that lead to the seamless integration of data between DMVs and election offices.*

The Commission notes that the adoption of online registration will provide DMVs with a ready-made portal to facilitate seamless transmission of voter registration data to the election office. An online registration portal can open at a specific point during the driver's license transaction, thus providing the convenient opportunity to register contemplated by the NVRA. Indeed, with online voter registration, a registration widget or portal can be placed on any state website to facilitate registration either by a voter or an administrator who is filling in a voter's information for other purposes.

**ATTACHMENT 2**

**Total Forms Received – Motor Vehicle Offices**

# NVRA Election Administration and Voting Survey

Summary - Table 2a. Application Sources: Total Forms Received - Motor Vehicle Offices

State	2012 Totals		
	Total	Cases	Pct.
Alabama	22,023	60	1.4
Alaska	82,224	1	32.9
Arizona	394,446	15	20.3
Arkansas	179,919	75	31.6
California	703,751	57	13.8
Colorado	469,786	64	22.8
Connecticut	20,537	169	4.8
Delaware	197,777	3	78.3
District of Columbia	93,174	1	63.9
Florida	681,185	67	42.4
Georgia	431,759	159	54.1
Hawaii	74,411	4	40.3
Idaho		0	0.0
Illinois	808,272	109	39.1
Indiana	694,386	92	33.3
Iowa	113,525	99	4.5
Kansas	273,224	105	44.4
Kentucky	647,063	120	54.7
Louisiana	576,577	64	46.3
Maine	27,820	500	11.0
Maryland	925,948	24	34.6
Massachusetts	293,432	351	18.8
Michigan	2,350,209	83	84.7
Minnesota	98,651	87	7.7
Mississippi	19,239	53	7.0
Missouri	268,191	116	20.9
Montana	36,534	56	14.8
Nebraska	162,286	93	35.9

State	2012 Totals		
	Total	Cases	Pct.
Nevada	138,368	17	28.2
New Hampshire	0	320	0.0
New Jersey	520,206	21	43.0
New Mexico	24,572	15	5.9
New York	638,065	62	62.6
North Carolina	616,206	100	23.2
North Dakota		0	
Ohio	447,946	88	14.1
Oklahoma	144,183	77	25.6
Oregon	244,283	36	30.5
Pennsylvania	2,187,386	67	67.4
Rhode Island	67,099	39	56.2
South Carolina	555,496	46	38.9
South Dakota	40,389	66	37.3
Tennessee	300,432	94	35.6
Texas	1,547,626	254	
Utah	591,119	29	49.4
Vermont	12,440	204	19.0
Virginia	1,206,659	134	40.0
Washington	352,290	39	31.2
West Virginia		0	0.0
Wisconsin		0	0.0
Wyoming		0	0.0
American Samoa		0	0.0
Guam		0	0.0
Puerto Rico		0	0.0
Virgin Islands		0	0.0

## **ATTACHMENT 3**

**June 4, 2013 Testimony of Christopher M. Thomas, Michigan Director of Elections, before Committee on House Administration, Washington, D.C. on H.R. 2115 – Election Administration: Making Voter Rolls More Complete and More Accurate.**



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
RUTH JOHNSON, SECRETARY OF STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
LANSING

**Testimony of Christopher M. Thomas, Michigan Director of Elections, before Committee on House Administration, Washington, D.C. on H.R. 2115 – Election Administration: Making Voter Rolls More Complete and More Accurate**

It is a pleasure to appear before the Committee on House Administration particularly with Chairman Miller at the helm. I extend Secretary Ruth Johnson's greetings to Chairman Miller and members of the Committee. We very much appreciate the introduction of and hearing on this important legislation.

I had the distinct honor of working for Chairman Miller for the eight years she served as Michigan's Secretary of State. Not only was she Michigan's chief election officer, but she was also the state's chief motor vehicle administrator. This legislation combines both elections and driver license administration.

In Michigan, we recently observed 38 years of Motor/Voter as the first State to implement this uniform and nondiscriminatory service to Michigan citizens. The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), now 20 years old, has substantially improved our election process. However, there are improvements that can be made to the NVRA to further increase efficiencies and integrity and reduce costs of voter registration for state and local election officials.

#### THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed by the legislation is the unnecessary retention of voter registration records of individuals who have left the State and applied for a driver's license in their new State of residence. The vast majority of voters who move from one State to another have no intention of remaining a resident in their former State for voting purposes. Each year Michigan is notified by other States that tens of thousands of voters have moved and applied for a driver license in the new State. In FY 2012 more than 73,000 individuals were reported to Michigan as having moved to another State. Under current practices, these individuals must remain on our Qualified Voter File for two November Federal elections after a cancellation notice is sent to them. These records can remain on the file for as long as four years after the notice is sent.

To be clear, there are rare instances where an individual who makes a temporary move to another State is required to apply for a driver license, even though the individual is not relinquishing residence in the former State.

Both the NVRA and Help America Vote Act (HAVA) have as their purpose the improvement of the accuracy and integrity of voter registration files used in Federal elections. Retaining tens of thousands of non-residents on our voter registration file does not further the purpose of either Federal law. How can the relationship established by the NVRA and HAVA between election officials and motor vehicle administrators be leveraged to ensure that those who have established a residence in another State for voting purposes can be removed from the voter registration files of their former State of residence?

## THE BACKGROUND

This legislation was requested as the result of litigation in 2008 (United States Student Association Foundation (USSAF) v Terri Lynn Land, 585 F. Supp. 2<sup>nd</sup> 925 (E.D. Mich. 2008)) challenging the cancellation policy of Michigan under the NVRA with regard to voters who moved to another state and surrendered their Michigan driver license when applying for a driver license in the new State. Based on written advice received by Michigan election officials in 1996 from the Office of Election Administration at the Federal Election Commission, we sent cancellation notices to voters who surrendered their Michigan license in another State and cancelled them after 30 days if no response was received.

The U.S. District Court concluded that:

“[T]here is no reason to believe that the kind of “residence” that any given state requires in order to issue a driver’s license is identical to “residence” for voting purposes....

“[T]he appearance of an out-of-state address on a driver’s license application simply does not establish that the applicant is no longer an eligible Michigan voter.”

Id. at 941. Essentially, the Court concluded that an individual can be a resident of one State for driving purposes and a resident of a different State for voting purposes. An application for a driver license in the new State does not satisfy the requirement that the individual indicate whether the residence is for voting purposes. An affirmative statement from the individual that the new State is the residence for voting purposes was a necessary requirement under the Court’s reasoning.

In light of the Court’s decision, we now send cancellation notices provided by section 8(d)(2) of the NVRA resulting in the retention of voter registration records of persons who moved out-of-state for two November Federal elections – up to 4 years.

Secretary Johnson successfully sought legislation in 2012 transferring the cancellation notice requirement for these voters from local election officials to the State Bureau of Elections to spare them from the costs involved. The new legislation was recently implemented with a mailing to 26,000 voters who have moved out of state and surrendered their Michigan driver license. This mailing cost approximately \$13,000.00 in addition to the costs of maintaining these records in our statewide Qualified Voter File.

We live in a very mobile society with millions of people moving from one state to another every year. The Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV) have worked diligently over the years to manage this migration, ensuring that citizens are not carrying multiple driver licenses in their wallets and purses. The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) has adopted a common sense policy: one license/one driver control record. Their policy states:

“A person shall have one license and one driver control record (DCR). The jurisdiction that issued the last license shall be designated as the jurisdiction of record, shall maintain the DCR of the individual and shall follow procedures as outlined in Appendix G. The DCR shall be the record on which licensing and withdrawal decisions are made. [Adopted 1995].”

Michigan has implemented this policy through the Michigan Vehicle Code, MCL 257.301(2):

“A person shall not receive a license to operate a motor vehicle until that person surrenders to the secretary of state all valid licenses to operate a motor vehicle issued to that person by this or any state or certifies that he or she does not possess a valid license. The secretary of state shall notify the issuing state that the licensee is now licensed in this state.”

This policy is implemented in each state at the point of application for a driver license or personal identification card. A person moving from one State to another will typically apply for a driver license or state personal identification card in the new State of residence. The DMV will require the applicant to surrender the driver license issued by the former State of residence and will then notify the former State of residence that the applicant has been issued a license or personal identification card in the new State of residence. This enables the former State to cancel the license or personal identification card of the former resident. See Attachment #1, a sample of notification received from Minnesota and Attachment #2, a Michigan driver license record showing the former state of residence of the driver.

Additionally, recent federal legislation and interstate driver license compacts/agreements all have similar requirements in regards to residency, one license, and one record. The Federal REAL ID Act of 2005 prohibits a REAL ID driver license applicant from holding more than one REAL ID card or driver license. The Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1986 made it illegal for commercial driver license (CDL) holders to possess more than one license. The Driver License Compact and Driver License Agreement require the one license, one record concept.

## THE SOLUTION

H.R. 2115 requires a driver license applicant to answer two questions:

1. Did the individual reside in another State prior to applying for the license? (If so, identify the State);
2. Does the individual intend for the new State to serve as the individual's residence for voter registration purposes?

The first question is already being asked within the current driver license application process, leaving the second question as the only additional information to be obtained from the applicant.

Under the amendment the DMV will attach an indicator to the list of those who have surrendered their license that is already being sent to the former State of residence. The indicator could be as simple as a “YES” or “NO” under the column heading: Resident for Voting Purposes Where Now Licensed. The residence information will then be transmitted by the DMV to the State election official, thus providing the confirmation from the applicant necessary to retain or cancel the voter registration.

This amendment is a common sense adjustment to the NVRA that protects voters who are only making temporary moves to another State while enabling States to more efficiently manage the voter registration file for the vast majority of applicants who are making a permanent move to a new State.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify on this amendment and personally thank Chairman Miller for introducing this legislation.

**Testimony of Christopher M. Thomas**  
**Executive Summary**

- Michigan enacted the first motor/voter program in the nation in 1975. More than 80% of the total voter registration transactions in Michigan each year are done through the motor/voter program. The success of Michigan's program is, in part, responsible for the motor/voter provisions of the NVRA.
- The Presidential Commission on Election Administration Report concludes that some states' departments of motor vehicles are the weakest link in the voter registration system. When states are not compliant with the law, it leads to preventable inaccuracies in the voter registration lists.
- Each voter registration applicant has had a face-to-face transaction with DMV staff where identification and legal presence are verified.
- Motor/voter cuts across all political and socio-economic strata. No other voter registration program serves such a large and diverse segment of the population.
- When motor/voter is not properly administered there are negative consequences to the election day experience of voters.
  - The number of provisional ballots cast increases, causing longer wait times for voters and extra work for election officials.
  - Voters arrive at their polling place only to find out they are in the wrong polling place or not registered.
- When motor/voter programs are properly administered the vast majority of provisional ballot may be eliminated.
- Delaware has successfully implemented an automated motor/voter system requiring no intricate integration with the motor vehicle administration computer system at a reasonably lower cost.
- With assistance from the PEW Charitable Trust election directors and motor vehicle administrators have begun a positive dialogue on fully implementing the NVRA mandates.
- H.R. 2115 will further increase the accuracy and integrity of each state's voter registration file.

**Christopher M. Thomas**  
**Biography**  
**(5/31/13)**

Christopher M. Thomas is employed by the Michigan Secretary of State as the Director of Elections and has served in this capacity since 1981. He administers the Michigan election law, campaign finance act and lobbyist disclosure law. He began his election administration career in 1974 in Washington, D.C. with the U.S. House of Representatives and the Federal Election Commission.

Chris earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science from Michigan State University, received his Masters Degree in Urban Affairs from St. Louis University in St. Louis, MO, and graduated from Thomas Cooley Law School in Lansing. He is currently a member of the Michigan State Bar Association. Chris has been an Adjunct Professor at Thomas M. Cooley Law School since 2001 teaching election law.

Chris is a founding member of the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED) and was elected NASED's President in 1997. At the NASED Conference in January 2013, he became NASED's President for the second time. He served as Chair of the Board of Advisors to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission from 2006-2008. This Board was created by the Help America Vote Act to review guidelines and studies before they are issued by the Election Assistance Commission.

At the NASED Summer Conference in 2012 he was honored to receive NASED's Distinguished Service Award.

On May 21, 2013, he was appointed by President Obama to the Presidential Commission on Election Administration.