

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORK SESSION HELD ON
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Thursday, December 4, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman, Telephonic; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, County Administrator
Paul Correa, Chief Civil Deputy County Attorney
Dylan Hendel, Civil Deputy County Attorney
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Melissa Avant, Elections Director
Billy Cloud, County Recorder
Ken Bennett, A.U.D.I.T USA Organization - Chairman
John Brakey, A.U.D.I.T USA Organization

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Board of Supervisors

1. Presentation and Discussion regarding Ken Bennett's outlining a 5-Point Plan to Verify Elections.

Ken Bennett, Chairman of A.U.D.I.T. USA Organization, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Mr. Bennett, stated he is a native Arizonan, born in Tucson and now residing in Prescott. Mr. Bennett recounted serving on the city council in the 1980s, the state board of education in the 1990s, the legislature in the 2000s, and as Secretary of State from 2009 to 2015. Mr. Bennett spoke about years of working with election officials and developing a strong interest in election integrity. Mr. Bennett expressed a long-standing goal of improving election verification, so election results can be certified with confidence, reflecting respect for established processes.

Chairman Antenori introduced the County Recorder, Billy Cloud, and County Elections Director, Melissa Avant.

In response to the Board, Mr. Bennett explained that A.U.D.I.T USA originated over twenty years ago in Tucson, formed by citizens concerned about the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) election involving significant funding. The group spent years examining election processes, which eventually prompted Pima County to create an election integrity commission and implement procedural changes for transparency.

Chairman Antenori commented that the aim in Cochise County is to increase transparency in the election process. Chairman Antenori mentioned the Election's office upgrades, allowing more public observation of tabulations in person. Chairman Antenori noted that the Board invited Mr. Bennett as part of a broader effort focused on election integrity and openness, reflecting long-standing practices of accountability.

Mr. Bennett praised Cochise County for actively pursuing election integrity and transparency. Mr. Bennett described overseeing the first statewide recount in Arizona, where a minor mistake in one precinct accounted for most vote discrepancies. The Board emphasized ongoing collaboration among county departments to improve processes and increase public access, reflecting long-held values of accuracy and accountability.

Mr. Bennett presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Mr. Bennett began the presentation by describing declining public trust in elections and noted polling numbers showing skepticism across political groups. He emphasized transparency as the key to rebuilding confidence and compared modern practices to early 1900s elections where ballots were openly visible and verifiable. Mr. Bennett introduced the Auditable Ballot Examination program, designed to mirror past transparency by allowing verification of ballot images against the cast vote record on a separate system. He stated the goal of the program was presented as creating a process the public can see, understand, and trust, honoring long-standing expectations of accountability.

In response to the Board, Mr. Bennett addressed concerns about privacy when publishing the cast vote record (CVR) for very small precincts. He noted that some precincts have very few voters, which could risk identifying individual votes. His recommendation was to combine small precincts or ballot styles to reach a minimum size before releasing results publicly, ensuring voter anonymity.

Chairman Antenori explained that while small numbers can occur with ballot styles, a full remedy won't be possible until the 2030 census and subsequent redistricting. Vice-Chairman Crosby clarified that the concern raised relates to ballot styles, not precincts.

Mr. Bennett outlined five key steps for election verification: publish registered voter lists, publish who voted, ensure the number of ballots matches voters, verify that ballot images match the cast vote record (CVR), and optionally perform random sample inspections of ballots against their images. He demonstrated how the Auditable, Ballot, Examination (ABE) program links ballot images to the CVR, allowing reviewers to confirm that each vote is accurately recorded.

Supervisor Gomez raised a concern involving Precinct 50, where a race was mistakenly left off certain ballots. She stated replacement ballots were issued, though the envelopes did not clearly indicate the difference, creating uncertainty about duplicate versus corrected submissions. Mr. Bennett discussed how the ballot images and cast vote records could verify accuracy, prevent double counting, and evaluate whether missing ballots might affect a close race.

Mr. Bennett explained that a precinct-level audit could be done with citizen volunteers from different parties using ballot images and the cast vote record to verify accuracy. One person could view the ballot image while another checks the recorded vote, helping confirm results through simple comparison. Mr. Bennett suggested avoiding redaction if possible and instead improving voter education, so individuals understand the implications of signing a ballot.

Ms. Avant asked whether an early board could simply redact a signature on a ballot, duplicate it, and proceed, so the record would show the original and the duplicate. Mr. Bennett confirmed that the approach would work.

Mr. Bennett emphasized that the system stays separate from election management servers to avoid concerns about interference. He spoke about public trust in elections and suggested increased transparency could improve confidence, noting other jurisdictions have begun releasing ballot images and cast vote records. Mr. Bennett referenced support for greater transparency from a former Secretary of State and highlighted counties already using similar practices. He stated the goal presented is to offer Cochise County a tool, free of cost, that could verify results, support audits, and help detect errors, potentially improving reporting accuracy even if not dramatically speeding up election night processes.

Supervisor Gomez stated that with a system like the one presented, confidence would increase by allowing comparison and confirmation that numbers match.

Chairman Antenori explained that citizens could access two computers in the recorder's office to review ballot images alongside the cast vote record for a chosen precinct. He stated this setup allows the public to conduct their own audit and verify results independently and if discrepancies are noticed, concerns can be brought to the Elections Director or the Board for further review.

Vice-Chairman Crosby emphasized that state law, specifically ARS 16-442B and Federal Elections Assistance Commission (EAC) standards, forms the foundation for election procedures. He stated if Mr. Bennett's transparency plan is delayed or overturned in court, the county would revert to these existing legal requirements. Vice-Chairman Crosby stated that key distinctions, such as revocation versus expiration of Voting System Test Laboratory (VSTL) accreditations and quorum rules, must be considered to maintain compliance.

Mr. Bennett clarified that ARS 16-442B primarily concerns statewide machine verification and certification, a process handled federally first. He noted that issues with machine testing are similar to other industries, where equipment may perform differently under real conditions than in test environments. He stated while his transparency plan does not replace equipment verification, it helps reassure the public by showing that ballot images and cast vote records align.

Mr. Bennett explained that the system's cost is minimal, requiring only about a \$2,000 computer with sufficient Random Access Memory (RAM), kept separate from the Election Management System (EMS). He noted that ABE can process roughly 60,000 ballot images in eight to nine minutes, creating precinct subtotals automatically. He stated this makes it far more efficient than manually preparing precincts for a citizen audit.

Chairman Antenori suggested running the system as a trial for the 2026 election without any legal mandate, just to test its effectiveness. He stated the initial trial would use a limited set of ballots to ensure voter anonymity, with full countywide implementation planned after precinct adjustments.

Vice-Chairman Crosby raised concerns about a recent bill and statements from the current Secretary of State regarding election misinformation and legal consequences for officials. He questioned whether it is the Secretary of State's duty to ensure compliance with federal and state election verification standards. Mr. Bennett

responded that it is indeed the Secretary of State's responsibility to confirm compliance, not simply accept federal assurances. He added that both he and the Secretary of State support radical transparency in elections.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 11:01 a.m.

APPROVED:

Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board