

December 2024

AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF
BAMBERG COUNTY'S BALLOT
RECONCILIATION WORKSHEETS
FROM THE NOVEMBER 2022
GENERAL ELECTION

The mission of the South Carolina State Election Commission (SEC) is to ensure every eligible citizen can register to vote and participate in fair and impartial elections, knowing that every vote counts and every vote matters.

Pursuant to S.C. Code §7-3-20(D)(3), the SEC is authorized to conduct audits of county boards of voter registration and elections to ensure those boards' compliance with applicable state or federal laws or SEC policies, procedures, or standardized processes regarding the conduct of elections or the voter registration process by all persons involved. These audits are conducted by the SEC's Audit Division.

Additionally, S.C. Code §7-3-25(A) authorizes the SEC to identify any compliance failures and establish and implement a corrective action to remedy such failures. Recommendations in this report will require implementation of a corrective action plan that is developed by the county and approved by the SEC's Audit Division.

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Summary of Results

For Bamberg County's ballot reconciliation worksheets from the November 2022 General Election, 82% (9/11) were completed, and 18% (2/11) were partially completed. Also, 45% (5/11) of the worksheets were reconciled, while 55% (6/11) were not reconciled.

Of the worksheets that were partially completed, this was due to the lack of a requirement from the State Election Commission (SEC) to fill every field, even if zero. Of the worksheets that did not reconcile, the issues involved ballot card counting errors, not accounting for unused ballots, illegibility, and not ensuring corrections are made during the worksheet review process.

Ensuring the hands-on training addresses how to account for unused ballots, how to legibly write noted issues, and including adequate notes to address reconciliation issues will likely improve the completion and reconciliation of these worksheets. Adequately completing and reconciling the ballot reconciliation worksheets for each polling location may give greater assurance that the results include all valid ballots cast.

Background

As defined by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, ballot reconciliation is the method in which election officials keep track of each ballot that has been printed or issued to a voter. Tracking the number of ballots printed, used, and unused during an election cycle ensures election officials have accounted for every ballot created and the election results include every valid ballot cast.

In South Carolina, printed paper ballots were not common until the state's current voting equipment was implemented in all 46 counties in 2020. Prior to then, the state used a direct recording electronic, or DRE, as part of its voting system. A DRE is a vote capture device, in which ballots are displayed, selections are made, and results are stored all via electronic format. The exceptions to this were the ballots printed for voters whose right to vote had been challenged at the precinct or who had moved but were still allowed to vote and the printed ballots used in emergency situations. Since these ballots were the only ballots in paper form, these were the only ballots that could be accounted for at the time.

South Carolina's transition in February 2020 to a paper-based voting system, with 100% printed paper ballots, significantly altered the process of accounting for ballots. In preparation for the change to this new system, the SEC developed a ballot reconciliation worksheet in September 2019 to account for and reconcile ballots supplied, used, not used, and lost as well as the number of voters who voted. Over the last five years, there have been minor updates to the worksheet, but it remains generally the same as the September 2019 version. Figure 1 below is an image of the ballot reconciliation worksheet used during the 2022 November General Election. It is important to note that a description of the worksheet and the terms used within are included in the analysis that follows.

Figure 1: S.C. State Election Commission’s Election Day Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet

County _____ Precinct _____ Date _____

Ballots Supplied		
A	Ballot Cards (Completed by County Office)	
B	Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Completed by County Office) (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional)	
C	Additional Ballot Cards	
D	Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional)	
Total 1		

Ballots Used		
E	Ballots Scanned (Ballot Cards and Emergency Ballots) (Number displayed on the Scanner/DS200)	
F	Provisional Ballots (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots/Envelopes)	
G	Spoiled Ballots (Ballot Cards + Hand-Marked Paper Ballots)	
Total 2		

Ballots Not Used		
H	Ballot Cards	
I	Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional)	
Total 3		

Voters Checked In		
J	Electronic Poll Book (EPB)	
K	Paper Poll List (Include Provisionals NOT entered in the EPB) (DO NOT Include Curbside Poll List)	
Total 4		

Total 2 + **Total 3** = (Should equal Total 1)

Total 4 + **G** = (Should equal Total 2)

Explain any discrepancies:

Are you returning any Emergency ballots that have not been scanned? Yes No
 (Do NOT include Provisional or Failsafe Provisional ballots)

SEC FRM 1150-202208

every vote matters.

every vote counts.

Source: S.C. State Election Commission

State Law and SEC Requirements

While state law only requires ballot reconciliation for election day, the SEC’s standardized operating procedures mandate this process for absentee and early voting as well. However, the scope of our audit was limited to election day ballot reconciliation, specifically for the 2022 November General Election. Therefore, the following sections provide an overview of the legal requirements for ballot reconciliation and the SEC’s ballot reconciliation worksheet as they pertain to election day.

Overview

S.C. Code §7-13-1150 requires poll clerks—the lead poll managers—to account for all ballots delivered to them and return the number of ballots supplied, spoiled—ballots that were defaced or marked in error—unused, voted, and lost, if any. S.C. Code §7-13-1410 requires poll managers to count the number of individuals who voted as well as unused and spoiled ballots. Between the two sections of the law, a poll clerk must account for ballots supplied, ballots used—including spoiled and lost ballots—ballots unused, and voters who voted. This accounting of ballots is also referred to as ballot reconciliation.

By Voting Type and Election Type

In the abovementioned sections of state law, the use of the terms poll clerk and precinct suggest that ballot reconciliation is performed by a clerk at a precinct, which only occurs on election day. As for election type, Title 7 of the S.C. Code of Laws applies to all types of elections—primary, general, special, and runoff. As such, ballot reconciliation is required to be performed for all types of elections. Because these worksheets are intended to ensure all valid ballots in an election have been cast, they are to be completed prior to a county’s certification—a statement by the county’s board of canvassers that election results are a true and accurate accounting of all votes cast in a particular election.

Overview of the Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet

The SEC’s ballot reconciliation worksheet is intended to be used by poll clerks to document, by precinct, the total ballots supplied, used, unused, and voters who voted. This worksheet accounts for these required components and contains two formulas, which are meant to ensure the appropriate values reconcile with each other. The following describes each section of the worksheet and the terms used.

Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet Top Portion

The top three-fourths of the worksheet contains 11 rows labeled A–K to record ballots supplied, used, and not used and voters checked in. Note, the worksheet accounts for voters who voted in the section “Voters Checked In,” as only voters who voted are checked in at a polling location. Specifically, rows A–K include the following:

ROW	ACCOUNTS FOR	INCLUDES
A	Ballots Supplied	Ballot Cards
B		Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
C		Additional Ballot Cards
D		Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
E	Ballots Used	Ballots Scanned
F		Provisional Ballots
G		Spoiled Ballots
H	Ballots Not Used	Ballot Cards
I		Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
J	Voters Checked In	Electronic Pollbook
K		Paper Poll List

Rows A–B are completed by county office staff, and rows C–K are completed by the poll clerk after the polls close. The terms used in the worksheet and referenced in the table above are defined below.

BALLOT CARD

The paper cardstock provided to a voter for the purpose of recording his vote selections using a ballot-marking device (definition below).

BALLOT-MARKING DEVICE

A piece of voting equipment that allows a voter to electronically select valid contest options and then produces a human-readable paper ballot. Ballots are not cast on this device.

HAND-MARKED PAPER BALLOT

A paper ballot marked by hand by a voter using a blue or black pen. A hand-marked paper ballot is used at the polling location for emergency voting, via an emergency ballot, and provisional voting, via a provisional or failsafe provisional ballot (definitions below).

EMERGENCY BALLOT

A hand-marked paper ballot used in the event the ballot-marking device is inoperable or otherwise unavailable. Generally, these ballots are cast at the polling location.

PROVISIONAL BALLOT

A hand-marked paper ballot used when a voter’s eligibility to vote is challenged, which may occur, for instance, if he has already received a ballot in the mail but insists on voting at a polling location.

FAILSAFE PROVISIONAL BALLOT

A hand-marked paper ballot used when a voter has moved from one precinct to another within the same county and failed to update

his address or has moved from one South Carolina county to another within 30 days of the election.

Provisional and failsafe provisional ballots are not counted on election day. Instead, they are stored in individual sealed envelopes and kept separate from ballots that have been cast; these are the envelopes referred to in row F on the worksheet. After the polls close but prior to certification, the voter's eligibility is reviewed, and a determination is made to either accept or reject these ballots based on this review by the county board of canvassers. Accepted ballots are then counted.

SCANNER/DS200

A piece of voting equipment used to read the voter selections from a ballot card or a hand-marked paper ballot. Ballots are cast on this device.

SPOILED BALLOT

A ballot that has been defaced or marked in error. For example, a voter may make a selection by mistake and then return the ballot to a poll clerk for a second ballot. The term "spoiled" is then written on the back of the ballot and retained for records. State law also refers to a spoiled ballot as a soiled, marred, and defaced ballot.

ELECTRONIC POLLBOOK

A piece of election equipment in the form of a tablet that contains the electronic version of the voter registration list, which is used to determine whether a person is eligible to vote in an election and in the precinct. These pollbooks also have the ability to capture a voter's signature, which is evidence that a voter took the voter's oath. Ballots are not cast on this device.

PAPER POLL LIST

A form containing the voter's oath and signatures of voters who have taken the voter's oath. Paper poll lists are used when the electronic pollbooks are not available or when voters must be checked in manually.

Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet Bottom Portion

The bottom one-fourth of the worksheet contains the reconciliation portion, which is also to be completed by the poll clerk. Line 1, as follows, is intended to reconcile the number of used and unused ballots with the total ballots supplied.

$$\text{Line 1:} \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{Total 2} \\ \text{(Ballots Used)} \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \text{Total 3} \\ \text{(Ballots Not Used)} \end{array} = \begin{array}{c} \text{Total 1} \\ \text{(Ballots Supplied)} \end{array}$$

Line 2 below is intended to reconcile the number of voters checked in with the number of ballots used.

$$\text{Line 2: } \begin{array}{c} \text{Total 4} \\ \text{(Voters Checked In)} \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \text{G} \\ \text{(Spoiled Ballots)} \end{array} = \begin{array}{c} \text{Total 2} \\ \text{(Ballots Used)} \end{array}$$

Beneath the reconciliation formulas, there is a space to address any issues, including ballots that were lost or unscanned.

Worksheet Color Coding

For ease of completion, ballot reconciliation worksheets are meant to be printed in color. Four different colors are used for Totals 2 through 4 as well as for spoiled ballots:

Color	Corresponds to	
None	Total 1	Ballots Supplied
Yellow	Total 2	Ballots Used
Blue	Total 3	Ballot Not Used
Orange	Total 4	Voters Checked In
Green	Row G	Spoiled Ballots

Each color at the top of the worksheet has a corresponding color at the bottom, where reconciliation is performed. These colors are meant to assist the user in transferring the data from the top to the correct field at the bottom. It is important to note the color yellow for Total 2 and the color orange for Total 4 can often appear similar in appearance when printed.

Polling Locations and Results

We reviewed the Bamberg County ballot reconciliation worksheets for the November 2022 General Election to determine whether they were adequately completed and reconciled. For this election, Bamberg County completed their ballot reconciliation worksheets by polling location, and all worksheets were available for review. Per S.C. Code §7-13-1150, ballot reconciliation worksheets are to be completed by precinct (see Appendix A). However, since counties, at times, consolidate one or more precincts into a single polling location, we conducted our analysis by polling location. For this election, Bamberg had 11 polling locations. Using survey design and data analysis tools, it was determined that to achieve a 99% confidence level with a margin of error ± 10 percentage points, all 11 polling locations needed to be included.

For this review, the term “completed” meant rows C–K contained values. If a field in rows C–K was blank, zero was assumed unless zeroes were used elsewhere on the worksheet. The total boxes for each section (Total 1, Total 2, Total 3, and Total 4) were not included within the definition of completed, as they were a separate method of counting ballots and voters to what was presented in rows C–K. Additionally, the term “reconciled” meant the addition in Line 1 and the resulting value in N equaled the value in Total 1 (Total Ballots Supplied), and the addition in Line 2 and the resulting value in Q equaled the value in Total 2 (Total Ballots Used).

Figure 2 below provides a diagram of what was considered completed and reconciled on the worksheet. Note, information in red was added to the diagram to distinguish otherwise unidentified fields and sections of the worksheet.

Figure 2: Worksheet Diagram for the Definition of Completed and Reconciled

County _____ Precinct _____ Date _____

Ballots Supplied		
A	Ballot Cards (Completed by County Office)	
B	Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Completed by County Office) (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional)	
C	Additional Ballot Cards	
D	Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional)	
Total 1		
Ballots Used		
E	Ballots Scanned (Ballot Cards and Emergency Ballots) (Number displayed on the Scanner/DS200)	
F	Provisional Ballots (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots/Envelopes)	
G	Spoiled Ballots (Ballot Cards + Hand-Marked Paper Ballots)	
Total 2		
Ballots Not Used		
H	Ballot Cards	
I	Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional)	
Total 3		
Voters Checked In		
J	Electronic Poll Book (EPB)	
K	Paper Poll List (Include Provisionals NOT entered in the EPB) (DO NOT Include Curbside Poll List)	
Total 4		

Line 1 Total 2 **L** + Total 3 **M** = **N** (Should equal Total 1)

Line 2 Total 4 **O** + G **P** = **Q** (Should equal Total 2)

Explain any discrepancies:

Are you returning any Emergency ballots that have not been scanned? Yes No
(Do NOT include Provisional or Failsafe Provisional ballots)

Poll Clerk Signature: _____ Time: _____

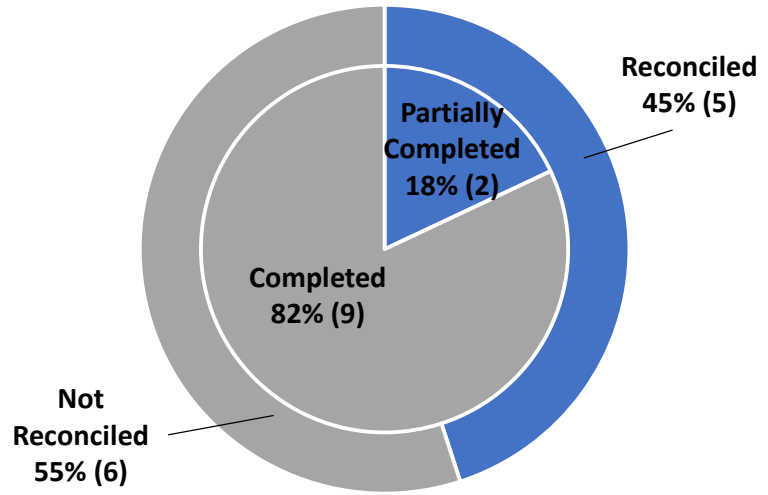
SEC FRM 1150-202208

**every vote matters.
every vote counts.**

Source: S.C. State Election Commission

The results are as follows: regarding completion, 82% (9/11) were completed, and 18% (2/11) were partially completed. Regarding reconciliation, 45% (5/11) were reconciled, and 55% (6/11) were not reconciled. Of the worksheets that did not reconcile, 9% (1/11) were not legible, and, therefore, deemed not reconciled. These numbers are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Overall Completion and Reconciliation Status of the Worksheets



Source: Analysis of Bamberg County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets
2022 General Election

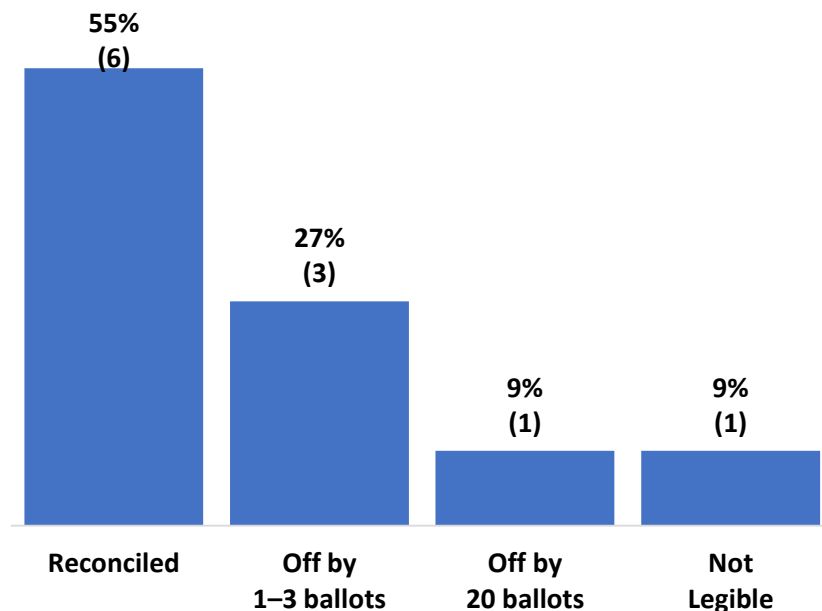
Completion of the Worksheets

For the two partially completed worksheets, one was missing a value in row C (Additional Ballot Cards) and the other was missing a value in rows C and D (Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots). If the user had filled in zeroes in these rows, then 100% of the worksheets would have been completed. The SEC's instructions for the worksheet did not require a user to fill all fields. However, as a third-party reviewer, it was difficult to discern if an empty field was an oversight or intentional. Requiring a value for all fields on the worksheet will likely improve clarity to all users. In December 2024, a recommendation was made to the SEC to require a value, even if zero, be written in each of the worksheet's fields.

Reconciliation of Line 1

With regard to reconciliation, we analyzed both Line 1 and Line 2. For Line 1: 55% (6/11) reconciled, 36% (4/11) did not reconcile, and 9% (1/11) had a number that was not legible enough to discern. This information is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Reconciliation Status of Line 1



Source: Analysis of Bamberg County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets, 2022 General Election

Of the worksheets that did not reconcile, three were off by between one and three ballots. These appear to be caused by a ballot card counting error by either the county election officials or the poll clerk. It is important to note that the ballot packaging process, which weighs rather than counts the ballots, could result in ballot packages being off by +/-2%; a package of 250 could be over or under by as many as 5 ballot cards. If county election officials and poll clerks count the ballot packages and not the individual cards, the values in rows A–D could be incorrect and therefore cause Total 1 (Ballots Supplied) to be incorrect.

According to a county election official, employees count blank ballot cards before sending them to the various polling locations, where the poll clerks then recount them to make sure the correct number of ballots supplied was written in rows A and B of the worksheets. For 36% (4/11) of the worksheets, we found evidence poll clerks had counted ballot cards and corrected the total stated by the county office as supplied (rows A–D). However, this evidence was not present in all worksheets that did not reconcile on Line 1. Continuing to train poll clerks to count individual ballot cards may ensure this practice is employed by all poll clerks.

The fourth worksheet that did not reconcile on Line 1 was off by 20 ballots. The 20 hand-marked paper ballots supplied by the county office were not accounted for, as row F (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Used) and row I (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Not Used) were both recorded as zero.

According to Bamberg County election officials, they provided training on ballot reconciliation worksheets leading up to the 2022 General Election

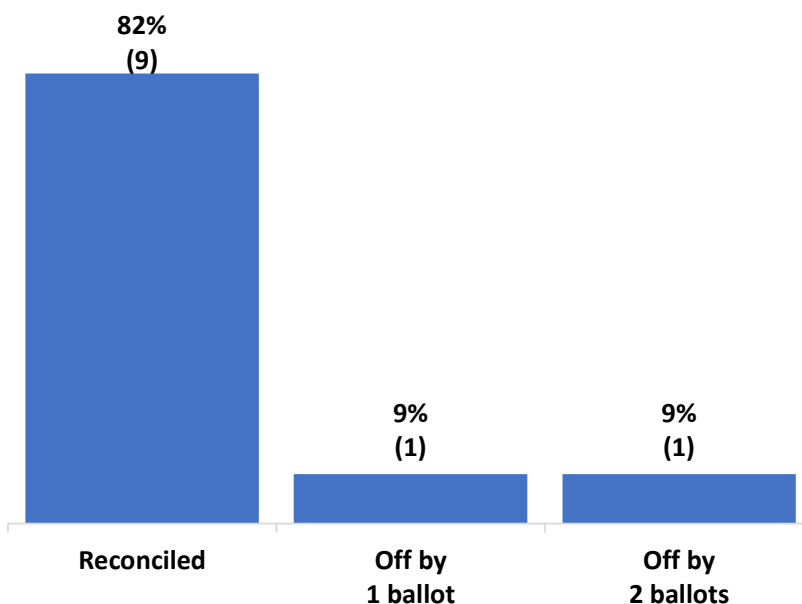
beyond what was covered in the training materials from the SEC, including a sample ballot reconciliation worksheet for poll clerks to fill out. Adding emphasis during these trainings on properly accounting for unused ballots may help to resolve this issue. Additionally, Bamberg County election officials stated that they met with poll clerks to ensure that the ballot reconciliation worksheets were properly reconciled; if not reconciled, election officials retained the clerk until the matter was resolved. While this may generally be the county's practice, its review did not identify or correct the unused ballots on this worksheet. Ensuring corrections are made during this worksheet review process may help the county to resolve these issues.

Lastly, one of the worksheets did not reconcile on Line 1 due to illegibility. The poll clerk attempted to make corrections, but overwrote the numbers in rows A–D in such a manner as to make it difficult to determine what the correct number was for each. Rows A–D and Total 1 were deemed not legible, and, therefore, Line 1 was considered not reconciled. Training on the importance of legibility and reviewing the worksheets for accuracy will likely resolve this issue.

Reconciliation of Line 2

For the worksheets regarding Line 2: 82% (9/11) reconciled, and 18% (2/11) did not reconcile. Of the worksheets that did not reconcile, one was off by one ballot, and the other was off by two ballots. This information is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Reconciliation Status of Line 2



Source: Analysis of Bamberg County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets, 2022 General Election

For the worksheets that did not reconcile on Line 2, the issues were unclear. The worksheet off by one ballot had a note from the poll clerk indicating that one ballot was not scanned and thus uncounted. The nature of the issue and reason for not scanning are not explained. If this ballot was scanned, the worksheet would have reconciled. The worksheet off by two ballots had a note that states “2 paper,” but it is unclear how to interpret the meaning of this note or how to apply it to any of the rows on the worksheet. Training poll clerks to adequately describe issues on the worksheet may improve clarity so that anyone can understand and apply its content. As stated earlier, a county worksheet review process prior to certification will help ensure clarity of questionable notes.

While there were minor reconciliation issues in this county, fully completing and reconciling all worksheets for each polling location will provide greater assurance that all valid ballots were included in the election results.

Recommendations

1. The Bamberg County Voter Registration and Elections Office should ensure poll clerks count blank ballot cards to verify the total supplied by the county is correct.
2. The Bamberg County Voter Registration and Elections Office should ensure its ballot reconciliation worksheet hands-on exercise addresses accounting for unused ballots, legibility, and writing adequate notes to identify any issues.
3. The Bamberg County Voter Registration and Elections Office should obtain clarification from poll clerks when noted issues are unclear.

Appendix A: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

This report provides the results of our compliance audit of the Bamberg County Voter Registration and Elections Office and its use of the ballot reconciliation worksheet. We conducted this audit under the provision of S.C. Code §7-3-20(D)(3). The review period for the audit was for the November 2022 General Election, and the objective was to determine whether precinct ballot reconciliation worksheets from this election were adequately completed and reconciled. To conduct this audit, we used a variety of sources of evidence, including:

- Federal and state laws.
- S.C. State Election Commission (SEC) policies and procedures.
- SEC training materials.
- Interviews with and surveys of county election officials.
- Information from South Carolina and other state agencies as well as the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.
- Contracts and information from Election Systems & Software and its vendor Printelect.
- Ballot reconciliation worksheets.

Criteria used to evaluate compliance was based on federal and state laws and agency policies, procedures, and training material. We reviewed internal controls in several areas, including SEC policies and procedures; county policies, procedures, and practices; and agency training. Our findings are detailed in this report.

Issue for Further Review

During our examination of the ballot reconciliation worksheets, we identified a potential legal compliance issue that requires further review. Specifically, in the November 2022 General Election, several counties consolidated multiple precincts into a single polling location.

Pursuant to S.C. Code §7-7-10, while counties are authorized to establish multiple polling places within a precinct, the statute does not grant authority to consolidate multiple precincts into a single polling location. Additionally, under S.C. Code §7-13-1150, ballot reconciliation worksheets must be completed at the precinct level.

Due to time constraints, we were unable to conduct a comprehensive analysis of this issue. However, it is briefly addressed here and is the reason our analysis was conducted by polling location rather than by individual precinct.

Appendix B: Bamberg County Comments

I agree with and choose not to refute the audit divisions' findings for the 22 General Election Ballot Reconciliation Worksheet Audit. Thanks for your time and the feedback provided. We have made the necessary adjustments to provide more accurate and legible ballot reconciliation worksheets.