

October 2025

AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF DARLINGTON 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.

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE ELECTION COMMISSION
1122 Lady Street
Suite 500
Columbia, SC 29201

scVOTES.gov

COMMISSIONERS Hon. Dennis W. Shedd Chairman

JoAnne Day

Clifford J. Edler

Vacant

Scott Moseley

Jenny Wooten
Interim Director

Thomas Nicholson General Counsel

Courtney Phillips Director of Audit

Naomi Washington Audit Manager

Alyssa Rhodes *Auditor*

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Summary of Results

For the November 2022 General Election, 44% of Darlington County's ballot reconciliation worksheets were completed, and 30% were reconciled. Of the 41% of worksheets that were partially completed, this was partly due to the lack of a requirement from the State Election Commission (SEC) to fill every field, even if zero. For the worksheets that were not reconciled, adjustments to the county's ballot reconciliation worksheet review process and poll clerk training may improve the 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 Precinct _____ Date ___ County_ Ballots Supplied A Ballot Cards (Completed by County Office) Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Completed by County Office) (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional) C | Additional Ballot Cards Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional) Total 1 **Ballots Used** 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 Hand-Marked Paper Ballots (Emergency/Provisional + Failsafe Provisional) Total 3 Voters Checked In Electronic Poll Book (EPB) 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 \Box No \Box (Do NOT include Provisional or Failsafe Provisional ballots) SEC FRM 1150-202208 very 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
В		Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
С		Additional Ballot Cards
D		Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots
Е	Ballots Used	Ballots Scanned
F		Provisional Ballots
G		Spoiled Ballots
Н	Ballots Not Used	Ballot Cards
I	Danois Noi Used	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.

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

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.

Sample and Results

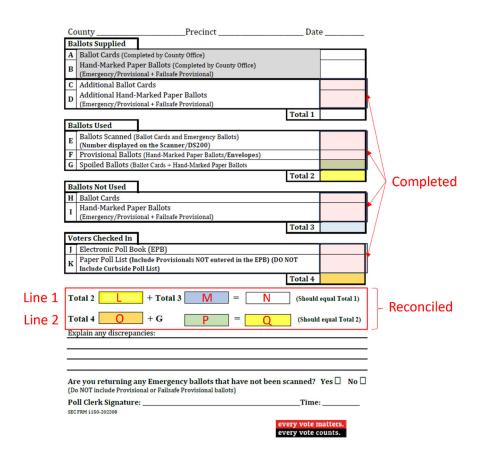
We reviewed a random sample of ballot reconciliation worksheets from the November 2022 General Election for Darlington County to determine if they were adequately completed and reconciled. For this election, the county completed its worksheets by precinct. Per S.C. Code §7-13-1150, ballot reconciliation worksheets are to be completed by precinct. However, since counties, at times, consolidate multiple precincts into a single polling location, we conducted our analysis by polling location.

For this election, the county had 32 polling locations. The random sample included 27 of 32 polling locations, and the results were calculated at a 99% confidence level with a margin of error of ± 10 percentage points. Therefore, these results can be generalized about all Darlington County polling locations during the 2022 General Election.

For this review, the term "completed" meant rows C–K contained values. If a field in rows C–K was blank, zero was assumed where logical unless zeros 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 from 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.

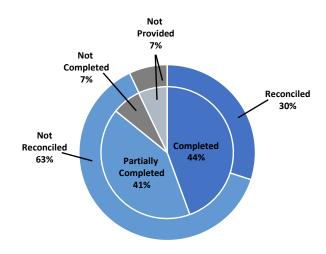
Figure 2: Worksheet Diagram for the Definition of Completed and Reconciled



Source: S.C. State Election Commission

For Darlington County, 44% (12/27) of its ballot reconciliation worksheets were completed, and 30% (8/27) were reconciled. Seven percent (2/27) of the sampled worksheets were not provided for review. Figure 3 below provides a breakdown of the completion and reconciliation status of these worksheets.

Figure 3: Overall Completion and Reconciliation Status of the Worksheets



Note: Inner chart off by 1% due to rounding.

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

Retention of the Worksheets

Worksheets for two polling locations in the sample were not provided. S.C. Regulation 12-517.5 requires county election offices to maintain election-related documents for two years after an election. The request for this information was in August 2023, approximately a year after the 2022 General Election. According to a county election official, for this election, the county used a checklist to ensure election materials were returned, and ballot reconciliation worksheets were a part of this checklist. However, it is unknown whether the staff completing the checklist ensured all worksheets were received. Thus, ensuring all worksheets have been returned during its worksheet review process may prevent the issue of missing worksheets.

Completion of the Worksheets

For all 11 of the worksheets considered partially completed, 1 or more rows were left blank. The most common rows left blank were rows C (Additional Ballot Cards) and D (Additional Hand-Marked Paper Ballots). If the user had filled in zeros for all blank rows, then 67% (18/27) of the worksheets would have been completed. The remaining five partially completed worksheets required values other than zero to be considered complete. Additionally, 7% (2/27) of the worksheets had no values written in rows C–K and thus were not completed.

The State Election Commission's (SEC) instructions for the worksheet used in the November 2022 General Election 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

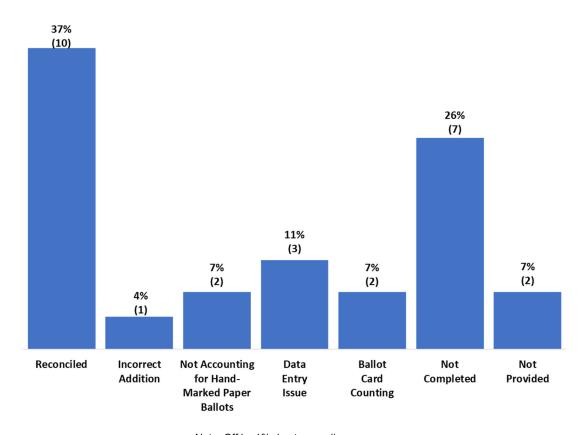
on the worksheet will likely improve clarity to all users. In December 2024, a recommendation was made to the SEC to require a value, even if zero, be written in each of the worksheet's fields.

According to a county election official, in November 2022, the county did not have a defined process for ensuring the worksheets were completed and reconciled. However, leading up to the November 2024 General Election, it had an established process that included reviewing the worksheets when they are returned on election night and following up with the poll clerks the following day if discrepancies are present. Ensuring the worksheets are completed during the worksheet review may prevent issues related to incompletion.

Reconciliation of Line 1

As for reconciliation, 37% (10/27) of worksheets reconciled in Line 1, 30% (8/27) did not, 26% (7/27) were not completed, and 7% (2/27) were not available for review. Figure 4 below provides a breakdown of Line 1.

Figure 4: Reconciliation Status of Line 1



Note: Off by 1% due to rounding.

Source: Analysis of Darlington County's Ballot Reconciliation Worksheets, 2022 General Election For the worksheet with incorrect addition, this was due to rows H (Ballot Cards Not Used), and I (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Not Used) not being added together correctly, which caused Total 3 and Line 1 to be incorrect. If the rows had been added together correctly, then Total 3 would have been correct, and the line would have reconciled. According to a county election official, as of 2024, poll clerks are trained on the ballot reconciliation worksheet using multiple hands-on exercises. Continued used of hands-on exercises during poll clerk trainings may prevent issues related to incorrect addition.

Two worksheets did not properly account for the hand-marked paper ballots. For example, one worksheet noted 90 hand-marked paper ballots were supplied (row B), and none of these ballots were used according to row F (Provisional Ballots Used). However, the clerk also did not account for the 90 unused provisional ballots in row I (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Not Used). A similar situation occurred on the other worksheet affected by this issue. Thus, if the unused hand-marked paper ballots had been accounted for, these worksheets would have reconciled in Line 1. Emphasizing how to account for hand-marked paper ballots throughout the worksheet during the poll clerk hands-on training exercises may prevent these issues.

Three worksheets had data entry errors. For example, one worksheet did not accurately enter the unused ballot cards into row H (Ballot Cards Not Used). This caused Total 3 and, subsequently, Line 1 to be incorrect. Similar data entry errors occurred on the other worksheets affected by this issue, as well as a failure to account for unused hand-marked paper ballots in row I (Hand-Marked Paper Ballots Not Used). Thus, if Total 3 had been completed correctly and the unused hand-marked paper ballots had been accounted for, these worksheets would have reconciled in Line 1. As stated previously, hands-on poll clerk training that emphasizes how to account for hand-marked paper ballots throughout the worksheet may prevent these issues.

The last two worksheets likely did not reconcile due to the ballot packaging process, which weighs rather than counts the ballots, and thus packs of ballots could be off by $\pm 2\%$. For instance, a package of 250 could be over or under by as many as 5 ballot cards. If county staff and poll clerks count the ballot packs and not the individual ballot cards, the values in rows A and C could be incorrect and, therefore, cause Total 1 (Total Ballots Supplied) to be incorrect. Thus, these worksheets most likely had an incorrect Total 1 to start with, which caused Line 1 to not reconcile.

According to a county election official, poll workers are trained to count individual ballot cards when a new pack is opened to ensure the totals listed in rows A and C are correct. Additionally, the county uses temporary staff leading up to the election to verify the number of ballots per package is accurate. Continuing to count the individual ballot cards, by both poll

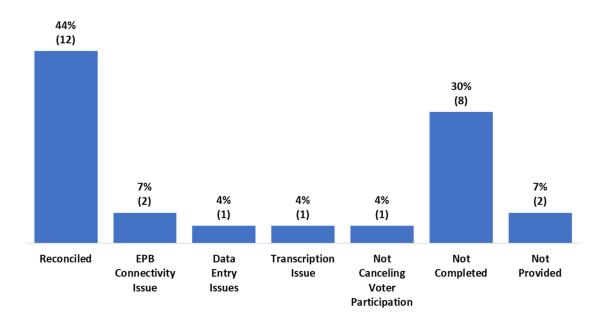
workers and office staff, will likely minimize differences between the actual and stated number of ballots supplied.

Lastly, seven worksheets were incomplete in Line 1. For two of the worksheets, neither rows C–K nor Line 1 had been completed. For four of the worksheets, some of rows C–K had been completed, but Line 1 was completely blank. For the last worksheet, Totals 2 and 3 had been transcribed to Line 1, but Line 1's total had not been added together. Regardless, based on the numbers available on these worksheets, they would not have reconciled even if they had been completed. As stated previously, ensuring the worksheets are completed during the county's worksheet review may prevent issues related to incompletion.

Reconciliation of Line 2

As for Line 2, 44% (12/27) of the worksheets were reconciled, 19% (5/27) of the worksheets were not, 30% (8/27) were not completed, and 7% (2/27) were not provided for review. Figure 5 below provides a breakdown of Line 2.

Figure 5: Reconciliation Status of Line 2



EPB=Electronic Pollbook

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

The issues preventing 19% (5/27) of worksheets from reconciling in Line 2 are discussed in further detail below.

# OF	MAIN	ISSUE
WORKSHEETS	ISSUE	DESCRIPTION
2	Electronic Pollbook Connectivity Issue	These worksheets were likely off due to EPB connectivity issues. On one worksheet, for example, based on the November 2022 General Election turnout data—data logged by the EPB host server that shows the count of voters who were issued voting credit—the total voters checked in was overstated by three. Using the turnout data, Line 2 reconciled on the worksheet. A similar situation occurred on the other worksheet affected by this issue. It is important to note that EPBs can have connectivity issues at polling locations, which can, at times, cause devices to display incorrect totals for voters checked at the polling location. However, the accurate log of checked-in voters is recorded in the turnout data. It is uncertain whether the impact of these connectivity issues was known at the time of this election. Reviewing the turnout report during the worksheet review process may prevent these types of issues.
1	Data Entry Issue	This worksheet contained an incorrect value in row E (Ballots Scanned). This was verified by reviewing the Scanner/DS200 data from the November 2022 General Election. Using the corrected data, Line 2 reconciled. As stated previously, continued hands-on poll clerk training may prevent data entry-related issues.
1	Transcription Issue	The user of this worksheet did not correctly transcribe the spoiled ballots (row G) at the top of the worksheet to Line 2 at the bottom of the worksheet. If the spoiled ballots had been correctly transcribed, the line would have reconciled. Continued hands-on poll clerk training that draws attention to the worksheet's color coding—a feature on the worksheet intended to assist with transcription of values—may prevent issues related to transcription.
1	Not Canceling Voter Participation	The poll clerk wrote, in the explanation section of the worksheet, that a ballot was "thrown in the trash" by the voter. Because the voter's identity was known, his participation needed to be canceled on the EPB. This would have resulted in the line reconciling. Training poll workers on when and how to cancel a voter's participation in the EPB may prevent this issue. However, it may be difficult to always know if a checked in voter has left with his ballot or stop a voter from taking his ballot, especially if the identity of the voter is not known. Under this circumstance, noting such a situation in the notes section on the worksheet is the only option to the poll clerk.
8	Not Completed	These worksheets were incomplete in Line 2. For two of the worksheets, neither rows C–K nor Line 2 had been completed. For four of the worksheets, some of rows C–K had been completed, but Line 2 was completely blank. For the last two worksheets, either one or both of the values had been transcribed to Line 2, but Line 2's total had not been added together. Only one of the eight worksheets would have reconciled

if it had been completed. Ensuring the worksheets are completed during its worksheet review based on returned election materials—spoiled ballots (row G), unused hand-marked paper ballots (row I), paper poll
lists (row K)—and the host server turnout report (row J) may prevent issues related to incompletion.

Adequately completing and reconciling the ballot reconciliation worksheets for each polling location may give greater assurance that the results include all valid ballots cast.

Recommendations

- 1. The Darlington County Voter Registration and Elections Office, during its worksheet review process, should:
 - Ensure all worksheets were returned and completed.
 - Check the worksheets against the host server turnout report data for voters checked in.
 - Check the worksheets against returned election materials, such as spoiled ballots and unused provisional ballots.
- 2. The Darlington County Voter Registration and Elections office, during poll worker training, should place emphasis on:
 - Accounting for hand-marked paper ballots.
 - The color-coding of the worksheet for transcription purposes.
 - When and how to cancel a voter's participation in the electronic pollbook.

Appendix A: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

This report provides the results of our compliance audit of the Darlington 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.

Appendix B: Darlington County Comments

No comments.