

MacQue Bohleen Under Investigation

by State of Montana for Alleged Election Law Violations-Her Time as Clerk and Recorder is Up-Vote for Integrity and Transparency

– Vote Cheryl Denton for Clerk and Recorder

By Staff Writer

Trust in local government isn't given—it's earned through transparency, statutory compliance, and absolute integrity. When public officials abuse their authority, conceal records, and obstruct the very citizens they are elected to serve, they forfeit the privilege of holding office.

As Carbon County voters prepare to cast their ballots this November, they face a stark reality: current Clerk and Recorder Macque Bohleen and her Election Administrator, Crystal Roascio, are the targets of a formal criminal investigation before the Montana Commissioner of Political Practices (COPP) for alleged violations of state criminal election law. <https://politicalpractices.mt.gov/home/Docket-of-Formal-Complaints/Bennett-v-Roascio.pdf>

The 2022 Election Night Shredding and Contradictory Statements

The cloud over the Clerk and Recorder's office stems from election night on November 8, 2022. Security camera footage from the Annex Building captured Election Administrator Crystal Roascio feeding approximately 21 batches of paper through an office shredder at roughly 8:45 p.m.—just minutes after polls closed. The paper weight, pre-folds, and visible timing marks strongly indicate these were official absentee ballot materials.

When asked directly on camera during a January 4, 2023 public meeting whether the county retains all election records, including UOCAVA (overseas and military) ballots, both Clerk Bohleen and Ms. Roascio affirmed unequivocally that they keep everything. Yet, when the shredding video became public, the county reversed course, issuing a press release claiming the shredding was merely "routine disposal" of printed UOCAVA materials.

Under federal law (52 U.S.C. § 20701) and Montana state statutes, election officials are mandated to retain all election records for a minimum of 22 months. You cannot claim on video to retain all records and then retroactively excuse election-night shredding as routine.

The Absentee Ballot Chain of Custody

There is another critical issue the public needs to understand. Montana mails absentee ballots to voters before Election Day, meaning county election offices begin receiving voted absentee ballots during the period leading up to Election Day.

Under MCA § 13-13-241, This process takes place as absentee ballots are being received and processed the full 28 days before Election Day. The election administrator and her staff are responsible for the initial handling and verification of these returned ballots. The election staff verify signature envelope, then open the signature envelop to remove the secrecy envelope containing the actual ballot. Montana election materials expressly state that the signature envelopes and secrecy envelopes are kept separate. The election judges and election-day observers are not present during that initial 28 days prior to Election to independently verify that the signatures matched and the secrecy envelopes eventually handed over to the judges are the same secrecy envelopes received inside the corresponding signature envelopes and approximately 80% of our county votes with mail-in ballots.

This means the chain of custody cannot be independently verified by the election judges or observers from the original voter's signature envelope to the secrecy envelope ultimately delivered for counting. By the time the judges receive the secrecy envelopes or ballots contained in those mailed in envelopes, the identifying signature envelope has already been separated from the ballot envelope. The judges and observers therefore have no independent way to establish that a particular secrecy envelope delivered to them is the same secrecy envelope that was originally received inside a particular voter's returned signature envelope.

In practical terms, Montana law places the public's trust in the election administrator



Macque Bohleen

and election staff to maintain the security and integrity of those separated ballots while they are in the election office. The critical question is: **Who has access to the room where those ballots are stored before they are delivered to the election judges? Who has keys or other means of access, and what independent records document that access?** Without that information, the public cannot independently verify the chain of custody during this critical period. That is why the laws governing election records and ballot handling are so important and why they need to be changed.

Because of these laws and procedures, we put one of our most critical checks and balances on government into the hands of one person who has the ability to intentionally change results while no one is looking. This is why it is imperative that the person entrusted with administering our elections be someone the public can trust—someone who operates with transparency, honesty, and integrity and is accountable to the people—meaning she or he should be elected not appointed. Because an appointed person is only beholden to their boss who hired them, not the people served.

If the public cannot independently follow the ballot from the moment it arrives at the election office through every subsequent stage of processing, then the integrity of the system depends upon the people entrusted with that responsibility and upon the records and safeguards they are required to maintain.

When an election administrator tells the public that election records are retained and protected, while election materials are subsequently discovered being destroyed and explanations concerning those materials change, the public has legitimate reason to demand answers.

The people of Carbon County deserve an election administrator who understands that these ballots and records belong to the public and that safeguarding them is a fundamental responsibility of the office. Macque Bohleen has shown neither the transparency nor the honesty that this responsibility requires.

The Missing Zero-Report Tape: A Straight Cut and Feigned Ignorance

The pattern of missing evidence doesn't stop with the shredding. Within a week of the November 2022 election, Chip Bennett submitted a formal request for copies of the physical tabulator tapes printed by the ES&S DS200 machines. That request revealed a glaring anomaly: the start-up portion of the tape for one of the two tabulators was completely missing.

This was not a jagged tear, paper jam, or natural roll end. The top of the tape bore a perfectly straight cut, as if executed cleanly with a cutting board or blade. Because that opening section was removed, there was no way for observers or the public to verify the machine's "zero report", the mandatory proof that the tabulator started at zero and contained no pre-loaded votes before counting began.

When confronted about the missing section of the continuous roll, Clerk and Recorder Macque Bohleen feigned ignorance. She claimed to have no idea why it was missing and offered no

explanation for where it went, stating simply that she couldn't find it. Whether driven by incompetence, malice, or a deliberate attempt to hide fraud, losing the critical legal proof of a zero baseline is a disqualifying failure of duty.

Broken Security Seals and Missing 2020–2021 Security Logs

Security controls under Bohleen's watch have broken down repeatedly. All tabulators utilized by the county were discovered with four broken security seals, one on each side of the two machines. Despite being responsible for election security, Bohleen and her staff had no idea the seals were broken and could offer no explanation as to when or how it happened, showing a complete lack of attention to detail.

Furthermore, Bohleen served as the primary Election Administrator from 2017 through March 2022. When a public records request was submitted in May 2022 requesting the previous 22 months of mandatory security logs, which track every instance a security seal is opened or replaced, the county produced zero logs for the entire period between January 2020 and January 2022.

As the election administrator during those two years, Bohleen was personally responsible for keeping those records. Did she forget to maintain them, or was she intentionally withholding them to hide something nefarious? Either way, gross negligence or intentional concealment of statutory security logs is not the standard of leadership Carbon County needs in a Clerk and Recorder.

Criminal Charges and a Pattern of Hostility

The pending criminal investigation against Bohleen and Roascio centers on potential criminal violations of Montana state election codes, specifically MCA § 13-35-206 (unlawful injury or destruction of election records) and MCA § 13-1-303 (unauthorized disposition of election materials), alongside the total failure to maintain required statutory election security logs.

Compounding these alleged criminal violations is a long-standing pattern of hostility regarding public records. Over the past several years, citizens seeking basic public documents have encountered arbitrary overcharging, unexcused delays, outright denials, and condescending, uncooperative behavior from the Clerk's office. Bohleen has consistently chosen to hide behind bureaucracy, stonewall citizen inquiries, and treat requests for transparency as personal attacks.

This refusal to respect constitutional right-to-know guarantees ultimately forced the filing of a formal Public Records Request lawsuit against Carbon County. That lawsuit remains active today—and notably, it stands as the primary legal barrier preventing the county from destroying critical election records from 2020 through 2024.

The Path Forward: Restore Integrity to Carbon County

The Clerk and Recorder is the custodian of our county's most sacred civic duties: maintaining public records, preserving historical archives, and administering fair, transparent elections. It is a position that demands absolute openness, honesty, and strict adherence to the law.

Macque Bohleen's tenure has been defined by secrecy, missing audit trails, unrecorded security seals, missing statutory logs, contradictory statements under oath, condescension toward taxpayers, and an active criminal investigation into the destruction of election materials. Carbon County taxpayers and voters deserve an administration that welcomes public oversight rather than fighting it in court.

This November, we have the power to restore trust to our local government. It is time for a conscientious, transparent, and honest leader who will respect the public's right to know and safeguard our elections.

Vote for accountability. Vote Denton for Carbon County Clerk and Recorder. 🗳️