



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Historical Analysis Shows Recall Elections are Scarce in New Jersey**

Nearly 650 elected officials in New Jersey have been targeted for recall since the first state law was enacted in 1911, but just 96 have been directly ousted by voters, according to research by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

This finding is contained in "Recall Elections in New Jersey- Citizen Safety Valve or Empty Threat?", the 30<sup>th</sup> white paper released by the agency since 1988. It is believed to be the only historical record of recall drives and elections ever compiled.

"While the right to recall public officials before their term expires has existed more than a century in the state, it is perhaps the rarest type of election," said Joseph Donohue, ELEC's deputy director and author of the research report. "When they do happen, they can draw a lot of attention."

A 1995 law extended the right to recall to state elected officials as well as school board members. Not one state official has been recalled or even been forced into a recall election. Only two school board members have been removed from office by voters during the 28-year period while one survived a recall election.

The pace of local recalls has slowed down since 1995, most likely because the law requires far more signatures on recall petitions than earlier laws that applied to just local officials.

Eighty recall elections have occurred in 112 years. In those elections, 96 officials- all municipal elected officials- were sent packing while 60 other local officials held onto their seats. The last recall election was in 2018. It is the only one in the past 13 years.

Recall elections have occurred in 56 municipalities- just 10 percent of the 564 New Jersey municipalities. They have been attempted in just a third of the state's municipalities (184).

"Few voters have ever taken part in a recall election in New Jersey. Many voters probably do not even realize they have that right," said Donohue.

While few have felt the direct sting of a recall, recall movements can be damaging.

Another 87 officials may have left office prematurely because they resigned, opted not to run for reelection, were otherwise removed from office or lost reelection after an unsuccessful recall drive.

One purpose of this report is to provide a historical record and real world perspective for current or future policy-makers who might want to change New Jersey's recall laws.

Since 1990, at least 123 recall committees have filed reports with ELEC though its oversight over recall elections didn't become statutory until the 1995 law.

Under ELEC regulations, targets of recalls and recall organizers both can set up committees to raise and spend funds. Contribution limits that apply to candidates also apply to recall committees. For instance, an individual, corporation or union can contribute \$2,600 for each recall election.

ELEC provides a manual to explain requirements for recall elections:

[https://www.elec.nj.gov/pdffiles/forms/compliance/comp\\_recall.pdf](https://www.elec.nj.gov/pdffiles/forms/compliance/comp_recall.pdf)

Copies of this white paper can be obtained at: <https://www.elec.nj.gov/aboutelec/whitepapers.htm>

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