



JESSE WHITE

Secretary of State

Jesse White (Democrat), the first African American to serve as Illinois Secretary of State, was first elected in 1998. He won landslide reelection campaigns in 2002 (in which he won all 102 counties), 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2018. On Nov. 6, 2018, White was reelected to a record-breaking sixth term, winning another landslide victory in which he earned over 3.1 million votes statewide — the most ever by a statewide candidate in a midterm election.

Prior to taking office in January 1999, the Office of Secretary of State was under a cloud of controversy resulting from a license-for-bribes scandal and a culture of corruption that plagued the office. White restored integrity and eliminated the culture of corruption by creating a strong, independent Inspector General’s office, banning political activities and fundraising requirements for office personnel, and reforming the commercial truck driving program.

Secretary White is also credited with significantly improving customer service and reducing the wait times at Driver Services facilities by introducing new technology and greatly expanding online services. Improving road safety has also been one of White’s top priorities. He has introduced groundbreaking programs and legislative initiatives that have made Illinois a national leader in traffic safety and directly led to lives saved on Illinois roads. He strengthened the state’s Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program for young drivers. Since its provisions were implemented in 2008, teen driving fatalities have dropped more than 74%.

Secretary White has fought continuously for tougher DUI laws, and he was honored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) with the Legislative Champion Award for his efforts to combat drunk driving. White initiated a comprehensive DUI law, which originated from his Advisory Committee on Traffic Safety, containing measures designed to increase participation in the state’s nationally heralded Breath Alcohol Ignition Interlock Device (BAIID) program.

Secretary White upgraded security features to the driver’s license/identification card (DL/ID) design and improved the issuance process in an effort to better protect citizens from fraud and identity theft. As a result, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security certified Illinois as fully compliant with the federal REAL ID Act. In spring 2019, White began issuing REAL ID-compliant driver’s licenses and ID cards statewide.

The Secretary of State’s Organ/Tissue Donor Program has received national acclaim and continues to serve as a model for other states. Illinois’ donor registry, which makes a person’s wishes to be a donor legally binding, has climbed to more than 7.1 million donors.

He founded the internationally renowned Jesse White Tumbling Team in 1959 and continues to work with the team to help keep at-risk youth drug-free and in school. Since creating the team, over 18,500 young people have benefited from the program.

Prior to becoming Secretary of State, White served in the General Assembly for 16 years and was Cook County Recorder of Deeds from 1992 to 1998. He played professional baseball with the Chicago Cubs organization, followed by a 33-year career as a teacher and administrator with Chicago Public Schools.

Secretary of State Jesse White was born in Alton, and he earned his bachelor’s from Alabama State College. He served as a paratrooper in the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division and was a member of the Illinois National Guard and Army Reserve. He lives on Chicago’s Near North Side. White has two daughters, Glenna and Lorraine; a son, Mark; and two grandchildren, Jesse and Susan.

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