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From the Baltimore Sun

Diebold drops Lamone brochure

Critics questioned ethics of marketing piece featuring Maryland's elections chief

By Melissa Harris
sun reporter

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Diebold Election Systems withdrew a sales brochure yesterday featuring Maryland Elections Administrator Linda H. Lamone praising the company's equipment after the governor and watchdog groups questioned whether the endorsement violated state ethics laws.

Diebold labeled the glossy, four-page brochure a "case study" of Maryland's experience with the ExpressPoll-5000 voter check-in equipment, which made its national debut in the state last year.

The marketing piece was distributed to potential clients at trade shows. It did not mention that the product crashed after every 43rd voter checked in during the September primary, leading to long lines and confusion among poll workers. State election officials reported generally smooth operations in the November election.

"I do think that the case study does provide important information about the benefits of electronic pollbook technology," Lamone wrote in a letter dated yesterday to Diebold. "However ... its apparent use for marketing purposes and the perception that I am providing a sales endorsement is not something I intended to or will support."

One page of the brochure features a photo of Lamone sitting in front of the Maryland flag next to a quote: "Our election judges love this product, and so do I. We in Maryland are extremely pleased with the performance of the system during the general election."

Lamone wrote the Texas-based vendor that if the company wanted to continue using Maryland as a case study, "please re-produce it without my public statements or my photograph."

Mark Radke, marketing director for Diebold, said the company was complying with Lamone's request.

Robert Ferraro, co-director of Save our Votes, a grassroots group that lobbies for "secure" elections, wrote the State Ethics Commission yesterday calling for an investigation. State law prohibits officials from using the "prestige" of their office for someone else's gain.

"To our eyes, there's too cozy of a relationship between the elections administrator and this company," Ferraro said.

On Wednesday, Gov. Martin O'Malley said through a spokesman that the ethics commission should review the matter and instructed Lamone to ask Diebold to withdraw the brochure.

The ExpressPoll-5000 is a voter check-in terminal. The e-poll books essentially store the state's voter registration database. They replaced the old, thick paper-based registers.

Diebold also manufactures the state's \$65 million touch-screen machines, which record the votes. The company has had to upgrade them several times since their first use in Maryland in 2004.

This year, the General Assembly voted to abandon the touch-screen machines after scientists discovered security flaws.

The switch, however, is contingent upon O'Malley inserting the money to buy a new paper-based system in his coming budget. The state is facing a \$1.5 billion budget shortfall starting in July 2008.

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