SAVEourVotes
SECURE·ACCESSIBLE·VERIFIABLE ELECTIONS FOR MARYLAND

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New Study Shows Maryland Could Save Millions by Switching to Optical Scan Voting

A report just released by the Department of Legislative Services shows Maryland could save at least $9.5 million over 8 years by replacing its aging touch-screen voting equipment with optically scanned paper ballots. The study estimates that the state already would have saved $1.6 to $5.2 million by now if we had switched in 2006.

The independent cost analysis was mandated last spring by the General Assembly to examine the true costs of operating the existing machines versus switching to the more verifiable voting system required by a law passed in 2007. Controversy over the costs erupted during last year's legislative session when State Elections Administrator Linda Lamone presented a cost comparison to Board of Public Works members that vastly overstated the cost of moving to optical scan while underestimating the costs of operating the existing machines.

SAVE Our Votes disputed those numbers, presenting legislators with a detailed analysis showing that the cost of implementing optical scan would be about the same as continuing to use the touch-screens.

After it was too late to purchase the new equipment, the SBE requested nearly $11 million in supplemental funds to conduct the 2010 elections using existing equipment — almost twice the amount they had originally projected. The GA appropriated the funds but authorized an independent review of the SBE's cost projections.

The study was conducted by RTI International, an independent nonprofit research firm. Key findings and recommendations include:

- The touch-screen equipment is reaching the end of its anticipated life-span, and will require a substantial ongoing investment in repairs and replacement machines while potentially putting our elections at risk.
- Optical scan voting would reduce the cost of labor needed to support and maintain the voting system, primarily because it uses only one-fifth the amount of equipment.
- The optical scan equipment bid selected but not funded last year was competitively priced and included appropriate types and quantities of voting equipment.
- Maryland should begin a phased-in transition as soon as possible to replace its oldest equipment before the 2012 General Election.
- The SBE should allow local election boards to choose the types of voting booths appropriate for their polling locations, based on master contracts negotiated by the state.

"This study shows that it's time for Linda Lamone to stop dragging her feet and move forward with optical scan voting," said Robert Ferraro, Co-Director of SAVE Our Votes.

Lamone, a staunch defender of the touch-screen voting machines, has said that Maryland will get a paper trail "over my dead body."

"Other states such as Florida, North Carolina, and New Mexico long ago rejected touch-screen voting after election-day melt-downs left their election results in doubt," said SOV Co-Director Shelley Fudge, "Optically scanned paper ballots are not only safer and more reliable — they will save the state dearly needed funds."

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