SAVEourVotes
SECURE·ACCESSIBLE·VERIFIABLE ELECTIONS FOR MARYLAND

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VOTING SYSTEM DELAYS COULD COST MARYLAND MILLIONS
Advocates Say Postponing Procurement of an Optical Scan System Not Cost-Effective
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee To Hear Proposals Tuesday, March 3 at 1:00pm

Legislation to be heard on Tuesday could delay the purchase of all or part of the new optical-scan (op-scan) voting system approved by lawmakers two years ago. Several bills introduced this session would modify requirements for the procurement of the new equipment. HB1211 and SB970, introduced by Del. Eckardt (R, Dist. 37B) and Sen. Colburn (R, Dist. 37), seek to postpone the implementation date of the new voting system until after 2014, when counties will have finished repaying loans used to purchase the current touch-screen voting system.

"We respect the concerns of our cash-strapped counties in these lean times," said Rebecca Wilson, Co-Director of SAVE our Votes, a nonprofit grassroots organization working for Secure, Accessible, Verifiable Elections in Maryland. "But this new voting system is so much more economical than our current system that both the state and counties will see an immediate reduction in voting system costs even while we are purchasing the system. And in five years, after the purchase loan is paid off, we can expect even more significant savings. Each year we continue using our touch-screen machines, we dig ourselves deeper into the red." SAVE our Votes' cost analysis of Maryland's voting system may be found at http://www.saveourvotes.org/reports/08-costs-mdvotingsystem.pdf.

The new voting system will use paper ballots counted by optical scanners. Each polling place will need just one scanner and one machine that enables voters with disabilities to mark and verify their ballots. These two machines will replace an average of ten or eleven touch-screen voting units. This 80% reduction in equipment will greatly reduce the operating costs of the voting system, including testing, maintenance, repairs, replacement, transportation, and storage of the machines. In addition, the equipment is much simpler, less prone to malfunction, and has a longer life expectancy than touch-screen systems. The proven reliability, economy, and accuracy of op-scan systems have made them the most widely used type of voting equipment in America today. The 2008 Minnesota recount revealed an accuracy rate of 99.9% with the op-scan systems in use there.

Maryland has outgrown its current system and had to rent additional voting machines to accommodate increases in voter registration in last November's election. Even with the additional equipment, wait times of more than two hours were documented throughout the state on Election Day. Despite record interest in this historic election and hundreds of thousands of new voter registrations, voter turnout was slightly lower than expected, perhaps because some voters may have been unable to find time to wait in the long lines. An op-scan system would enable voters to mark their ballots anywhere there is a private space to mark them, without needing any expensive equipment, which would expand through-put capacity during peak voting hours and greatly reduce wait times.

 "The current budget crunch makes it more important than ever to move quickly to a less expensive voting system," said Wilson. "Maryland can't afford to wait."
Links:
    HB1211: http://mlis.state.md.us/2009rs/billfile/hb1211.htm
    SB970: http://mlis.state.md.us/2009rs/billfile/sb0970.htm
    Cost Analysis of Maryland's Electronic Voting System:
    http://www.saveourvotes.org/reports/08-costs-mdvotingsystem.pdf

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