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Election Watchdog Group to Monitor Baltimore City Primary

SAVE our Votes, a grassroots election integrity organization, will monitor the Baltimore City Primary Election on Tuesday, September 11, 2007. Citizen volunteers, working as election judges and credentialed poll watchers for candidates, will be checking for compliance with election laws, rules and procedures, and be on the lookout for any problems with the paperless, electronic voting system.

“Numerous studies of Maryland’s Diebold touchscreen voting system have shown it to be very vulnerable to undetectable tampering, and California recently decertified similar machines for this reason,” said Shelley Fudge, Co-Director of the Columbia, MD based organization. “Maryland’s Board of Elections relies on administrative procedures to protect these machines from tampering, so strict compliance with these rules is extremely important.”

Voters in Tuesday’s primary election are urged to be attentive to any glitches or strange behavior from the touchscreen voting machines and to insist that election judges record any problems in their election day logs. Past monitoring efforts around the state have documented various types of problems such as candidates missing from the ballot, difficulty selecting a candidate’s name with the screen touch, and machines freezing up in the middle of voting. All of these problems could cause an inaccurate recording of voters’ choices.

Similar problems in the November, 2006, election in Sarasota County, FL, resulted in 18,000 votes going unrecorded in an hotly contested race for the US Congress that was decided by less than 400 votes. With some very close races expected in this primary election, even seemingly small problems could alter the outcomes.

“The overall, and presently unsolvable problem, however, is that Maryland’s paperless system cannot be audited for accuracy”, said Robert Ferraro, another Co-Director of the group. “If, by fraud or malfunction, the fully electronic system fails to accurately record or tally votes, we have no way of recovering lost or changed votes.”

This glaring deficiency will be remedied when Maryland changes to a paper-based voting system in 2010. The General Assembly mandated this change unanimously earlier this year. Governor O’Malley recently pledged to fund this change of voting system on a Baltimore radio show last week. A two minute audio clip of his remarks is available at the SAVEourVotes.org website.

Robert Ferraro will be on the ground in Baltimore City on election day and available all day for interviews or questions. He can be reached at 301-661-2989 (cell).