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Study Predicts Long Lines at Maryland Polls in November Voting Rights Advocates Propose Plan to Reduce Wait Times

With high turnout predicted in the hotly contested presidential race, a recent study by physicist William Edelstein shows that many Maryland voters can expect to wait hours to vote in November's elections (see attached packet, page 2). The study found that most polling places could experience wait times of more than 2 hours at some point on Election Day if voters take more than 6 minutes each to mark their ballots. The sites most likely to be affected are those in which a majority of voters arrive at peak voting times before and after the work day.

"It is a process similar to what everyone experiences on roads, as people in the Baltimore/Washington metro area know only too well," said Dr. Edelstein of SAVE Our Votes (SOV), a nonprofit group advocating Secure, Accessible, Verifiable Elections for Maryland. "Traffic flows smoothly as long as the density is low. As volume increases, traffic gradually slows until, at some concentration, it locks up and cars accumulate into long lines which can take hours to clear."

Maryland's State Board of Elections (SBE) plans to spend \$100,000 to rent additional voting machines for the November election to accommodate increases in voter registrations. But Edelstein's study shows that the extra equipment will do very little to reduce the long lines that many voters encountered in Maryland's 2004 and 2006 elections.

"There is no doubt that many voters who cannot wait will leave without voting, including the elderly, the infirm, people needing to get to work, or parents needing to care for children," he said.

The solution recommended by Dr. Edelstein and others is to increase voting system capacity by allowing voters to use paper ballots when long lines begin to form. A letter (attached) sent Monday by Fair Elections Legal Network (<http://www.fairelectionsnetwork.com>) on behalf of SOV asks the SBE to authorize the use of emergency paper ballots to prevent voter disenfranchisement caused by long waits.

"These paper ballots are already supplied to precincts for use in emergencies or during court-ordered extended voting hours," said Robert Ferraro, co-director of SOV. "The State Board of Elections should allow them to be used also to prevent or reduce long wait times."

Maryland Attorney General Douglas Gansler supports this solution. Speaking about the findings of his task force that had studied irregularities in the state's 2006 elections on National Public Radio's Kojo Nnamdi Show in May, Mr. Gansler told a caller, "The notion of emergency paper ballots is ... a great idea, in my view." (Listen at: <http://wamu.org/programs/kn/08/05/01.php>)

Elections officials have raised objections to this use of emergency ballots, instead encouraging voters to mark their choices ahead of time on sample ballots to speed up the process of casting their votes and to vote during the middle of the day. But voters who commute long distances to a job or whose work or family schedules are inflexible may not find midday voting a realistic option.

SAVE Our Votes and Fair Elections Legal Network expect the SBE to address the issue at its meeting on Thursday, July 24 at 2:30 pm at the State Board's office at 151 West St, Annapolis.