

**Center for Popular Democracy \* Common Cause Maryland \* Communities  
Unite \* DEMOS \* League of Women Voters of Maryland \* Save Our Votes**

August 25, 2015

Board of Public Works  
80 Calvert St, Room 117  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

ATTN: The Honorable Lawrence Hogan  
The Honorable Peter Franchot  
The Honorable Nancy Kopp

Dear Members of the Board of Public Works,

The groups listed above respectfully request that you reconsider the contract submitted by the State Board of Elections on June 23<sup>rd</sup> for \$1.8 million to fund voter outreach and education around the new voting systems. The new machines create a significantly different voter experience than our previous systems, and will be used for the first time during a presidential election year when voter turnout is typically at its peak. Voter education is critical to ensure that voters feel their vote has been cast correctly, and to minimize the long lines that plagued our last presidential election year.

The transition to secure, paper-trail voting machines is a significant step forward. This step forward should not also force voters to step back due to confusion at the polling place resulting in long lines and a distrust of the new system. The new machines are not only different from the machines used in the 2014 election, but the system used on Election Day will be different from the system used during early voting.

The fear about these machines causing delays and uncertainty is far from speculative. When New York transitioned to scanned ballots in 2012, the New York City elections resulted in “chaos”<sup>1</sup> and “confusion”<sup>2</sup> for both poll workers and voters. Early demonstrations in Maryland have proven equally confusing, with difficulty explaining the two step process and further complications feeding the ballots into the scanner. Even should the voting transition prove relatively smooth, a small delay of just 30 seconds per voter adds up; if 600 voters come to a precinct in one day, that 30 seconds will add five hours to the total voting time over the course of the day.

Maryland was plagued with difficulties during our last presidential election. Long lines resulted in a new mandate by the General Assembly to ensure that wait times do not lag past 30 minutes. While we laud the ambitious and important goal of that policy, it may prove impossible

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/07/nyregion/chaos-at-new-york-city-polls-amid-new-rules-and-voting-machines.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/07/nyregion/chaos-at-new-york-city-polls-amid-new-rules-and-voting-machines.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> <http://patch.com/new-york/commack/new-voting-machines-confuse-voters-and-poll-workers>

to attain if voter education is not done aggressively by the state to ensure voters are ready for the new systems in April and November.

Leaving this task to the counties is patently unfair. The state has always shared the cost of the new systems with the local jurisdictions; so, too, should the state share the cost of training. Many county budget cycles have already closed and this decision came too late for them to appropriate additional education funds in their budget. Furthermore, the local jurisdictions that struggled this year with the most significant budget deficits are largely the same jurisdictions that are home to historically marginalized voting populations. The state has a role, and a responsibility, to ensure equal access to education and outreach to voters regardless of where they reside.

While the non-profit community is ready and willing to help with education and outreach, our collective efforts cannot match the impact of the proposed state contract. We understand that the State Board of Elections is working with the vendor to submit a smaller contract, which we hope will allay the concerns of the Board. However, it is worth noting that the original contract would have cost only \$0.50 per registered voter. That is not an outrageous investment in our democracy.

We thank you in advance for reconsidering this proposal and helping to ensure a smooth, successful election in 2016.

Sincerely,

Katrina L. Gamble, PhD  
Director of Civic Engagement & Politics  
Center for Popular Democracy

Liz Kennedy  
Campaign Strategist & Counsel  
DEMOS

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel,  
Executive Director  
Common Cause Maryland

*Nancy Soreng,  
Co-President  
League of Women Voters of Maryland*

Jane Henderson,  
Executive Director  
Communities Unite

Rebecca Wilson,  
Co-Director  
Save Our Votes

CC: Linda Lamone, Administrator  
Nikki Charlson, Deputy Administrator  
Maryland State Board of Elections