

Coalition for Peace Action

• 40 Years of Peacemaking •

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December 20, 2019

Re: Hand Marked Paper Ballot and Optical Scan Voting System

Honorable Mercer County Executive, Board of Chosen Freeholders,
County Clerk, and Superintendent of Elections:

We write to urgently request that Mercer County purchase and implement a new County voting system for the June 2020 presidential primary, composed of hand marked paper ballots, precinct based optical scan tabulating machines, and ballot marking devices for the disabled. The integrity of our elections is at stake. **Hand marked “paper records are critical for auditing elections and detecting tampering with vote tallies.”¹**

Other states have successfully shifted to hand marked paper ballots and optical scanners in a matter of months. Counties in Virginia replaced their direct-recording electronic voting machines (DREs) in as little as eight weeks.² Respectfully, if Mercer County is going to secure the June election, now is the time to act. **The pilot project in Princeton using the *Dominion Image Cast Precinct scanner system* was deemed very successful by all those who chose, administered, and participated. We thank you for your foresight in implementing the pilot and urge you to move countywide with this type of system.** We believe it is likely that only one optical scanner may be needed in each polling location. Multiple districts that share one location could all use the same scanner.

While a few NJ counties have mistakenly chosen hybrid “All-In-One” voting machines, where the machine marks the ballot via a touch screen pad, **we urge Mercer County to reject the hybrid model and move away from touch screens.** The hybrid “All-In-One” machine has proven unreliable and insecure, the latest incident in Pennsylvania being reported on the front page of *The New York Times*.³ Furthermore, the purchase of these hybrid machines would cost more than the purchase of optical scan systems because more machines would be needed (two or more hybrids per polling place versus one optical scan). For example: today in polling places containing four (4) voting districts, there are at least eight (8) DREs or two (2) per district. Since the Hybrid/All-in-One systems are like DREs, the replacement would be one to one. In contrast, one optical scan tabulator could accommodate all four (4) districts. This would yield a cost savings, and the County would also save on lower transportation and storage costs.

There are significant benefits to the optical scan system besides cost. Long lines in front of new machines can be nearly eliminated. After receiving a ballot, the voter would go to one of many privacy booths and take as much time as needed to mark the ballot. When there is no machine between the voter’s hand and the voter’s ballot, there is no possibility of electronic hacking. **The precinct based optical scan machine system coupled with a random paper audit provides the greatest security available according to national and local experts like Andrew Appel and Edward Felten. Voting can occur even with electrical failures because the paper ballots can be securely held and later scanned when the**

¹ [Experts assess voting security as midterm elections approach](#), Molly Sharlach, Office of Engineering Communications, Princeton University, October 29, 2018.

² Byron Tau, “Virginia Ends Use of Touchscreen Voting Machines,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 11, 2017 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/virginia-ends-use-of-touchscreen-voting-machines-1505167555>

³ [A Pennsylvania County’s Election Day Nightmare Underscores Voting Machine Concerns](#), “New York Times, by Nick Corasaniti, Nov. 30, 2019



electricity returns, or can be hand counted. Most voters who have taken standardized tests, or who have voted by mail, are familiar with filling in the bubble next to a candidate's name.

There are several ways to finance a transition to new machines. If an outright purchase is not possible, the machines can be bought on an installment plan, or they can be leased with an option to buy, thereby overcoming budgetary constraints. In each case, vendors are able to loan the county machines for training even before the delivery of purchased machines. **We urge Mercer County to lead the State by selecting an optical scanning system like the one that was tested in Princeton, the *Dominion Image Cast Precinct* scanner system, and implement the system in time for the June 2020 election. The ES&S DS200 Optical Scanner or another similar optical scan system would also be a viable solution. The use of hand marked paper ballots is critical, and consequently the troublesome hybrid model systems should be removed from consideration.**

Thank you.

Irene Etkin Goldman, Board Chair, Coalition for Peace Action (CFPA)
Stephanie Harris, Chair Voting Integrity Task Force - CFPA
Robert Moore, Executive Director – CFPA
Jonette Smart, President NAACP-Trenton Branch
Coreen Grooms, 2nd Vice President, Education Chair NAACP – Trenton Branch
Jean Y. Durbin, President, Princeton Community Democratic Organization (PCDO)
Susan Greenhalgh, Vice President for Policy and Programs National Election Defense Coalition (NEDC)
Liz Lempert, Mayor, Princeton NJ
Adrian Hyde, Executive Director, Northeast Organic Farmers Association of NJ (NOFA-NJ)
Sarah Steward, Ewing Township Councilwoman
Marty Johnson, Executive Director, Isles, Inc.
Marcia Marley, President, Blue Wave NJ (BWNJ)
Ann Rea, Chair, Electoral Reform Working Group BWNJ
Renee Steinhagen, Executive Director, NJ Appleseed
Dena Mottola Jaborska, Associate Director, NJ Citizen Action
List in progress..january 6, 2020

cc: Andrew Appel, Eugene Higgins Professor of Computer Science, Princeton University
Edward Felten, Robert E. Kahn Professor of Computer Science and Public Affairs, Princeton University