Testimony on Senate Bill 48

Presented to the Pennsylvania Senate State Government Committee

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by

Hon. Jeff Haste

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&
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Like every other county in the Commonwealth, we take great pride in the security and integrity of our elections here in Dauphin County.

It is our responsibility to make sure every step of the process – from verifying voter registrations to training poll workers to counting and certifying elections – is held to strict security standards so voters can have confidence in our election results.

We also believe that our current voting systems, while they do not have a paper trail system, are secure and that every vote is properly counted. We have nearly 500 direct recording electronic (DRE) systems, which have no internet or Wifi connection, nor are they capable of being connected to the internet. Last session, this committee had the opportunity to see a demonstration of these machines at our courthouse and to hear about the security and safety features built into our system, including chain of custody of the memory cartridges. These machines are programmed, tested for logic and accuracy, and sealed before each primary and general election. We also verify operation once in the polling place and perform post-election reviews.

That said, we knew that at some point in the future, our county was going to look at purchasing new machines as they began to reach the end of their useful life and we started to explore new options in technology and operating systems. However, we anticipated this would still be several years in the future as we evaluated our options, particularly for funding. We estimate replacing all of our equipment will cost our county somewhere between $4 million and $10 million, which equates to anywhere between a 4% (*0.27 additional mills*) to 10% (*0.68 additional mills*) tax increase for our property taxpayers. This is a very big deal for a county that has prided itself on fiscal responsibility, always looking for ways to improve services and lower costs, which has led us to be able to hold the line on property taxes in Dauphin County for a record 14 straight years.

The Stein settlement has completely upended our plans, as it has for all of our counties, by forcing us into a corner to purchase new machines whether or not we need them right now and whether or not we have the resources to do so. For our part, Dauphin County does not have the funding readily available to replace all of our machines at this time. Though we appreciate that the Governor has committed to seeking half the estimated cost, the truth is that counties will likely not know what kind of funding assistance the state may provide, or if it will provide any at all, until this year's state budget process is completed.

We agree that this situation warrants looking at the standards for decertification of machines by the Department of State in the future, as well as the process and oversight, and we appreciate the dialogue prompted by Sen. Gordner's Senate Bill 48. But as others have said here today, even if this legislation becomes effective tomorrow, the settlement agreement between the Department of State and the Stein campaign remains in place, and we do not see a way to stop this train coming down the tracks. At this point, our focus must be on seeking maximum funding, working with our state and federal partners, and sooner rather than later so that we can have certainty of what resources might be available rather than wondering each year whether the next installment of funding will be approved as well.

We appreciate that this committee continues to bring counties to the table to engage in these discussions on how we can improve the election system. It is an example of how the state-county partnership should work, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to address the challenges counties are facing so that together we can assure our elections remain fair, secure and accurate.