



**United States Election Assistance Commission**

**Testimony of the Honorable Pedro A. Cortés  
Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
on the EAC's Role as a Clearinghouse  
Washington, DC**

**March 22, 2005**

Chairwoman Hillman, Commissioners of the United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC), Good Morning!

My name is Pedro A. Cortés and I serve as Pennsylvania's Secretary of the Commonwealth. In this capacity, I manage the Pennsylvania Department of State, the agency charged with overseeing the state's electoral process.

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's meeting. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on ways that the EAC can continue to assist the states in its role as a clearinghouse. The suggestions I am about to present will surely be of benefit to me in Pennsylvania and to my colleagues in other states and territories.

Before I proceed with my recommendations, please allow me to note that in December 2004, Governor Edward G. Rendell established the Pennsylvania Election Reform Task Force to consider a host of election issues. They include: voter participation; provisional and absentee voting; accessibility compliance; and the upgrading of our voting equipment. I serve as the Chairperson of the Task Force. I am confident that the deliberations of the Task Force will yield valuable recommendations to improve the electoral process in Pennsylvania.

The above being said, Pennsylvania looks forward to receiving further guidance from the EAC on how to properly and realistically implement the mandates of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). To this end, it would be extremely helpful if the EAC could provide additional information and clarification on the following areas:

1) Voting System Standards – I am aware that the EAC and the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) are working diligently to issue a draft of voluntary voting system standards by next month, April 2005. Many states, including Pennsylvania, eagerly await these standards in order to purchase new voting equipment. Given that states must have HAVA compliant voting systems in place by January 1, 2006, I would appreciate if the EAC could develop a suggested timeline for how states can meet this mandate. Ideally, the timeline would consider the period vendors may need to incorporate new standards into their equipment, federal and state testing and certification requirements, and the procurement and deployment of said equipment.

2) Statewide Voter Registration Lists – In addition to the forthcoming EAC guidance on the statewide voter registration lists, I would suggest a comprehensive assessment of the different voter registration systems states have implemented or plan to implement. The goal of such an assessment would be to identify best practices and challenges that states have had to overcome. Questions to consider include: whether the system was built in-house or with the help of an outside vendor; how the database works; how voter information is exchanged between the state election office and the end users; and related development and implementation issues.

3) Cost to Implement HAVA – I am frequently asked by legislators, advocacy groups, reporters and the public how much it will cost to implement HAVA and to hold elections under the new mandates. More specifically, how much money states and local governments will have

to contribute. I would welcome a study that answers the above, along with information on how states plan to address and pay for their various accessibility requirements – e.g., making polling places fully accessible and providing services to voters with limited English proficiency.

4). Frequently Asked Questions on the EAC Website – Election officials and voters alike would benefit from additional questions and answers on the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Commission’s Website. Relevant Q&A for this section can be taken from EAC training sessions such as the one held at the most recent National Association of Secretaries of State Winter Conference. Answers in the FAQ section could even include a hyperlink to advisory opinions the EAC has issued on the given subject.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank the EAC for giving me the opportunity to present these recommendations at today’s meeting. I also want to thank the EAC for its commitment to help Pennsylvania and other jurisdictions implement the provisions of the Help America Vote Act.