

SAVE Our Votes

SECURE • ACCESSIBLE • VERIFIABLE ELECTIONS FOR MARYLAND

December 8, 2008

Rosemary Rodriguez, Chair
Election Assistance Commission
1225 New York Avenue N.W., Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005

Honorable Chairwoman Rodriguez and EAC Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input about the 2008 Election Day Survey and voting system performance. SAVE Our Votes had more than 200 observers monitoring the November election this year, either serving as election judges or other election staff or as roving monitors. We worked in coordination with 3 national voting problems hot-lines: 866-OUR-VOTE, 866-MYVOTE1, and CNN's hot-line, both in reporting problems to them and in investigating problem reports received by them. We have also monitored all previous elections in Maryland beginning in 2004.

A more complete report will be forthcoming when we have finished analyzing all the data from election day reports, but based on our observations of the 2008 election cycle as well as the earlier ones, we would like to make the following recommendations.

Election administrators should measure and report four key indicators to evaluate the performance of elections and to provide information for making improvements:

1. **Accuracy of registration databases** – Are the right people permitted to vote?
Our election-day observations indicate that much work remains to be done in this area. Many new voters, especially those who had signed up through the Motor-Voter program even several months before the deadline, did not find themselves on the rolls.
2. **Peak wait times at the polls** – Are the wait times short enough throughout the voting day not to discourage citizens from voting?
Our observers documented wait times throughout the morning on November 4 that routinely exceeded 2 hours in all of the most populous regions of the state, and in some cases were as long as 5 hours.
3. **Implementation of security procedures** – Are all procedures designed to secure the election system being followed correctly?
Our observers documented serious lapses in routine security procedures that could easily impact election integrity.
4. **Accuracy of the vote count** – Would the initially declared outcome stand if a full recount were conducted?
Routine audits of election results should be standard procedure, as they are in the financial world or in any other field where small inaccuracies can cause major problems.

There are obstacles for routinely measuring these critical performance indicators. States need:

1. Agreed-upon operational definitions of what should be measured to ensure usefulness, consistency and understanding;
2. Determination of how the measurements will be accomplished;
3. Availability of data in a format (like EML) easy to accurately and quickly access for further analysis. Data in problematic formats has been particularly troublesome for those conducting post-election audits (e.g., in Humboldt, Marin, Santa Cruz and Yolo Counties in California and in Boulder, Colorado) because they need to quickly access the initial results from the election management system in order to properly plan the post-election audit. All initial precinct level results should be available on the web in an electronic format like EML so that they can be easily accessed and used in calculations without intermediate steps which are costly, time consuming and have the potential of introducing errors. When Maryland begins voting with paper ballots in 2010 it will be key to have easily accessible, accurate initial election results.

Successful corporations regularly measure and report critical performance indicators to evaluate their performance, benchmark themselves against competitors and identify areas needing improvement. The same management techniques should be used for elections.

Thank you again for your openness to seeking public input to improve the quality of America's election process.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Wilson
Co-Director, SAVE OurVotes
301/864-7922
rebecca@saveourvotes.org