U.S. Election Assistance Commission Regarding Statewide Voter Registration Databases

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Written Testimony of Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie

The Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State began developing our statewide voter registration database over twenty years ago. The current version—known as the *Statewide Voter Registration System* (SVRS)—is web-based to allow statewide access for local, county and state election officials. SVRS features top-down architecture with a single database and application for consistency and accuracy. It provides all of the tools needed for precinct- and district-level voter file management through address ranges, the generation of election rosters, and the posting of voting history and reports.

One of the most important features of SVRS is its capability to fully integrate with all of our other election system applications. For example:

- *Election Reporting System* (ERS) is our software application created to record political candidate filings at the beginning of the election season and to track all candidates through election night. Candidate filing data can be exported to vendors for ballot printing and voting equipment programming. ERS interfaces with SVRS to provide web-based, precinct-level reporting on election night; produces all canvassing reports; and generates all other election summary reports.

- *Polling Place Finder* helps voters locate their polling place online. This web-based tool interacts with the address range feature of SVRS to determine a user's polling location and it works together with ERS to provide candidate information.

- *Caucus Finder* is an adaptation of Polling Place Finder. The Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State worked with the state's six political parties to develop a web tool where users could enter their address and receive information about the caucuses. To my knowledge, this is the first multipartisan online caucus locator in the nation. On Super Tuesday, hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans successfully used this service.

- *SVRS View* is a separate view-only application designed for exclusive use by city and school election clerks and staff. Voter registration data is updated from SVRS, but all nonpublic information is removed.

With the introduction of statewide voter registration in the early 1970s, Minnesota legislators worked to create a system that would be simple and secure. Registration was seen as a good way to provide accurate lists of potential voters to candidates and others working to boost voter turnout; however, it was understood that it could become a barrier to voting. For this reason, the introduction of voter registration on a statewide basis was linked to same-day/Election Day registration so that no eligible voter would be unconstitutionally disenfranchised by voter registration.

Our statewide database was built with the same goals—to be as secure, accurate, and easy to use as possible. We have worked hard to make sure our statewide voter registration database helps to boost voter turnout, not depress it. By having our system automatically accept information from other state agencies, like the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Health, we can keep the database up-to-date and as clean as possible. For example, when citizens register to vote when applying for their driver's license, we receive electronic records daily from the Department of Vehicle Services. We re-direct this information to the appropriate county-level election office for processing. The distribution system is paperless as counties receive all records electronically for easier processing. Additionally, SVRS is able to link with the Social Security Administration's database to authenticate the last four digits of a social security number for people who wish to register using an SSN instead of a state I.D. number. The system also receives information from the Department of Public Safety to identify felons and citizens placed under guardianship.

Minnesota's SVRS provides a number of additional special services to local election officials. For example, even though Minnesota is an Election Day Registration (EDR) state, there is a pre-registration cut-off date twenty-one days prior to the election. When the county auditor (or local election official) receives a voter registration application after the deadline, SVRS places the information into a pending file and generates a late notice to registrants indicating that their names will not be placed on the voting roster for the coming election (however, the post card tells them where their polling place is located and allows them to use the post card as proof

of residency for registering at the polls on election day). On the day following the election, the status of all pending registrants is switched to an active registration and names will be placed on the voting roster for the next election.

In preparation for Election Day, polling place rosters can be printed at either the state or county level. Local election officials are able to note on the system when the input of all pre-registrations are complete and designate whether they will print their rosters locally or request the state to print and ship them. This allows for economies of scale for large print jobs and flexibility for short timeframes, such as when rosters must be printed quickly for a special election.

Following Election Day, counties can use the Election Day Registration module of SVRS to enter the information of voters who registered on Election Day. The system verifies that the registrations were done in the correct precincts by linking to an address range and simultaneously posts voting histories. Additionally, notification correspondence is automatically generated if the system determines that the voter was allowed to register in the wrong polling place.

In preparation for the upcoming elections, Minnesota is currently in the process of instituting a number of upgrades to further improve the functionality and performance of our statewide registration system. The items that we are implementing in 2008 include:

- *Automated Address Updates*: Legislation passed this year allows the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State to use the U.S. Postal Service's National Change of Address database (NCOA) to automatically update registration for voters who move within the state. Notices are generated by the system and mailed to voters at their new addresses stating that their registration has been updated and they have twenty-one days to notify their county auditor if they do not wish to have their registration changed.

- *Express Absentee Module*: A new, streamlined interface will allow county auditors to enter absentee ballot requests using a single screen format instead of multiple ones and expedite processing for registered voters without address changes.

- *Poll Finder Sample Ballots*: In addition to the previously offered service of the Poll Finder listing all candidates for a voter's precinct, a new option will allow each county to

place links to sample ballots in PDF format so that voters can familiarize themselves with their ballots prior to Election Day.

- *Infrastructure Improvements*: SVRS Reports were converted from Crystal Reports to Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services, improving system performance and load distribution, as the number of SVRS users continues to increase.

Minnesota's voter registration system, including our database and our same-day registration, is a large part of why we continue to lead the nation in voter turnout. Our voters trust our system; they know it is fair, accurate, and that no eligible voters will be disenfranchised.

Minnesota will see 80 percent turnout of eligible voters on Election Day—a feat unmatched in over fifty years. Our SVRS is ready to handle this large volume—making our democracy as welcoming as possible for voters, secure for candidates, and easy to administer for all of our election officials.