

Comments to the Allegheny County Board of Elections in support of hand-marked paper ballots as the primary voting method for elections

The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh recommends the acquisition of the Hart InterCivic configuration which uses hand-marked paper ballots, the Verity Touch Writer ballot marking device and the Verity Scan precinct level optical scanner.

The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh is a long-time advocate for transparent, auditable, accessible, and secure voting procedures. This board will soon make the decision to purchase the next generation of voting equipment. We have a recommendation to share with you. In preparation for this recommendation, we have drawn on local, state, and national studies of voting systems, election integrity, our regular observation and participation in elections as many League members serve as Judges of Elections and election panel members. We know the current system pretty well. When you provided the opportunity to meet the vendor, to see the equipment at public events around the county, League members were there. We talked to the vendors, we tried the equipment, we observed and talked with people with physical disabilities to learn their reaction to the various systems proposed for voters needing assistance. Many of them shared their extreme frustration with the current equipment. We believe we were doing our own “due diligence” before coming before you with this recommendation.

Your public meeting on June 7th to listen and question three experts invited to advise you on about this decision was very helpful. The experts were Marian Schneider, President of Verified Voting and formerly the Deputy Secretary of State for Voting and Administration; Christopher Deluzio, from Pitt’s Cyber Law, Policy and Security Institute; and Candice Hoke, a seasoned veteran of election system failures who now leads the Center for Election Integrity in Pittsburgh and has advised California, Ohio, US DOJ, US DOD, and US DHS on cybersecurity.

The bottom line for each expert was that the best method from all perspectives is a voter hand-marked paper ballot. There is no question that this ballot clearly documents the voter’s intentions. For citizens not able to use this method, a simple Ballot Marking Device that produces a paper ballot that is identical to the hand-marked ballot used by all the other voters is the choice. **There should not be any technology such as a summary ballot or the use of barcodes in any form that interferes with the voters’ intention. If the voter can’t read and verify his/her ballot as it will be tabulated, the integrity of the system is questionable.** The voting process should be simple, clear to all citizens and visually auditable by anyone in the polling place.

We recommend the following criteria for selecting the vendor and the equipment. The solution is based on:

- Most voters hand mark a paper ballot
- Voters who cannot hand-mark a ballot have access to a simple ballot-marking device that prints a complete ballot that looks the same as the paper ballot others are using
- The voter takes the paper ballot to a scanner and observes it being scanned before leaving the polling place.

Based on our own due diligence review of the vendor offerings, two systems can be recommended, but one more strongly. Our top choice is the Hart InterCivic configuration which uses hand-marked paper ballots; plus their Verity Touch Writer ballot-marking device (BMD) for those who cannot hand-mark a paper ballot. Their BMD produces a paper ballot that looks exactly like the ballots others are using and does not add barcodes or other information that the voter cannot verify. Their Verity Scan precinct-level optical scanner completes this recommendation. This configuration is simple, low cost, and fully satisfies the best practices we hope to enjoy in Allegheny County.

The second system that complies with the recommendations of the security experts is the Clear Ballot systems comprising the Clear Cast precinct-level optical scanner and the Clear Access ballot-marking device. We don't rate the Clear Cast scanner as highly as the Hart InterCivic Verity Scan because the Clear Cast stacks ballots in the exact order in which they were cast, thus compromising the anonymity and privacy of voters. Clear Ballot also has a small install-base.

At one point, the cost of printing lots of paper ballots was raised as an increased cost of this approach. The PA Legislature is considering changing this requirement to a reasonable number of pre-printed ballots and the cost of printing ballots is likely no longer an issue.

As Candice Hoke advised us at the hearing, **the best solution is also the cheapest.** Our members who regularly work on elections believe that the selection of equipment which meets this standard provides the opportunity to change the rest of our election day procedures, that the roles of election officials will change and that fewer poll workers will be needed. It is nice to have this opportunity to provide the most secure voting system possible and reduce overall costs at the same time.

Thank you.