



Voting in PA, What's Next?

It's no secret: Pennsylvania's electoral infrastructure needs to be updated. Some of the commonwealth's 67 counties are using machines from the 1980s. Change is coming.

The Pennsylvania Department of State issued a directive in February mandating all future voting machines to include a voter-verifiable paper ballot or some form of paper record for each vote cast at the polling place.

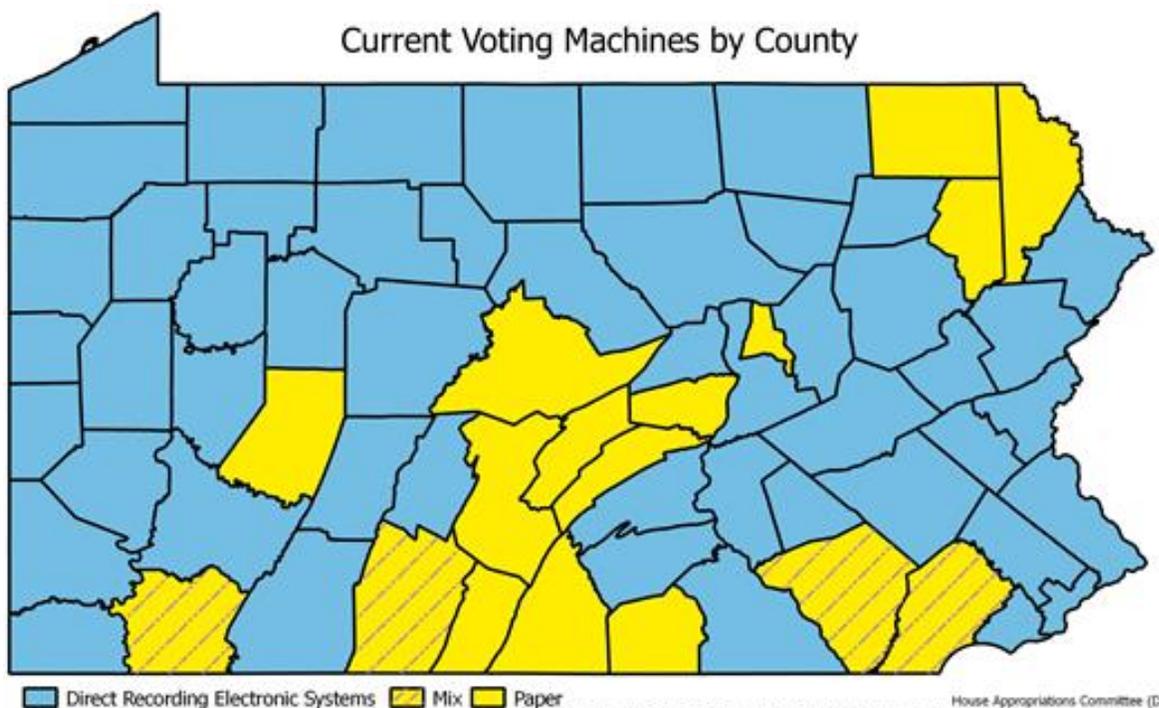
The directive is consistent with a May 2018 US Senate Intelligence Committee Report on "Russian Targeting of Election Infrastructure During the 2016 Election," which said, "States should rapidly replace outdated and vulnerable voting systems. At a minimum, any machine purchased going forward should have a voter-verified paper trail and no Wi-Fi capability."

The Department of State is instructing PA counties to have these new systems in place by the end of 2019, and ideally counting ballots by the November 2019 general election. Current machines could be decertified by the May 2020 primary.

Before all of this happens, Pennsylvania and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission must evaluate and certify systems before counties select their new systems.

What kind of voting systems are in place today?

- Fifty of Pennsylvania's 67 counties are using direct recording electronic systems. DREs electronically display precinct-specific ballots and votes are stored in an electronic memory device. When all critical voting elements occur electronically, the system becomes vulnerable to manipulation and hacking. To make matters worse, DREs lack a paper trail that can be voter-verified and scrutinized by an independent audit.
- Thirteen counties use optical scan systems capable of providing a voter-verified paper trail. However, these systems will also require upgrading due to their outdated operating systems.
- Four counties use a combination of DREs and optical scan systems.



How much will it cost to replace the current systems?

The [Brennen Center for Justice believes](#) the cost of machines could vary from \$2,000-\$5,000 per ballot marking device and \$2,500-\$5,000 for optical scanners. The Department of State estimates 24,000 voting machines in 9,161 commonwealth precincts that are used by 8.7 million registered voters.

Assuming each of the 24,000 machines is replaced by a ballot marking device and that each precinct receives an optical scanner, the statewide cost would range from \$70.9 million - \$165.8 million.

However, Pennsylvania's decentralized electoral system allows counties wide discretion on negotiating the lease or purchase of voting machines and makes a complete and accurate cost difficult to calculate. Numerous factors -- including individual vender discounts, servicing and maintenance contracts, as well as number of machines included per order -- will skew costs from county to county.

Who will pay for the new equipment?

In Pennsylvania, counties are responsible for costs associated with conducting elections. The most recent updates to voting technology happened when the federal government fully funded the endeavor through the Help America Vote Act, or HAVA, in 2002. Pennsylvania received \$147 million in HAVA funding from 2003 to 2010.

Republicans in Washington have reversed course on this policy, however, and expect the states and counties to shoulder the majority of the cost to improve electoral systems. In its 2018 spending plan, Congress included pennies on the dollar in HAVA grant funding. Pennsylvania will still receive \$13,476,000 in HAVA grant funds, but will need to provide \$674,000 in state matching funds in the 2019/20 budget.

The Department of State plans to distribute the combined \$14.15 million in grants to counties for the costs associated with purchasing eligible voting equipment. The grants will be proportionate to each county's number of registered voters as of April 17, 2018.

How are other states paying for upgrades?

Many states are also in the process of determining how to make voting system upgrades a reality. While Pennsylvania has a decentralized process for counties selecting and purchasing voting equipment, 20 states have adopted a more centralized process.

From a cost perspective, a more centralized procurement process strengthens negotiating power with vendors and allows states to more-efficiently plan and control costs. In these states, direct appropriations at the state level make sense. For decentralized states, grant and loan programs for counties may make more sense. Programs structured to incentivize counties to implement best practices and make efficient use of funds would provide decentralized states maximum leverage and savings for taxpayers.

Ohio recently passed \$114.5 million in state funding to buy new machines through a unified statewide purchase/lease program and reimburse counties that already bought new equipment. The House Democratic Appropriations Committee's statewide cost estimate of \$70.9 million - \$165.8 million for Pennsylvania aligns well with our neighbors' experience. Keep in mind that Pennsylvania has roughly a million more people than Ohio and Ohio has centralized some of its operations in a way that Pennsylvania has yet to do.

Is there a better way?

Pennsylvania policymakers have many options to save money and increase participation in elections, all while ensuring the safety and security of the ballot. House Democrats have introduced bills advocating for these changes in recent years. HACD looks forward to providing information on these and other reforms in a future publication.

House Appropriations Committee (D)

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