



2019 ISSUE PAPER: ELECTION SECURITY

Position statement

In order to ensure integrity and voter confidence in elections, the LWVUS supports the implementation of voting systems and procedures that are “secure, accurate, re-countable, accessible, and transparent.” The League supports only voting systems that are “designed so that they:

- employ a voter verifiable paper ballot or other paper record, said paper being the official record of the voter’s intent;
- the voter can verify, either by eye or with the aid of suitable devices for those who have impaired vision, that the paper ballot/record accurately reflects his or her intent; such verification takes place while the voter is still in the process of voting;
- the paper ballot/record is used for audits and recounts;
- the vote totals can be verified by an independent hand count of the paper ballot/record;
- routine audits of the paper ballot/record in randomly selected precincts can be conducted in every election, and the results published by the jurisdiction.”

Election security has become daily national news, but the issue of securing our elections is not new. After the 2000 presidential election there was a push for states to move away from punch card style paper ballots, and federal funding was provided for states to buy new voting machines. Many states purchased voting machines that did not provide any paper record or audit trail, and soon cybersecurity experts began highlighting concerns with voting machine vulnerabilities.

Over the last decade, multiple state and national reports have recommended securing elections by ensuring there is a voter verified paper ballot or record for every vote, and that routine post-election audits use statistical methods to ensure high certainty in the election outcome.

Summary of Issues for the 2019 Legislative Session

As a vote by mail state, Washington has a paper ballot of record for most voters. Prior to August 2018, any voter in Washington could return their ballot via an email attachment. Secretary Wyman changed this practice by filing emergency rules eliminating email ballot return for voters who are not classified as overseas or service. Overseas and service voters are allowed to return their ballot via an email attachment without mailing in a paper ballot. Email ballot return is a security concern due to the possibility of the ballot being modified in transit without the voter or the election official ever knowing. In addition, there is the risk of malware being carried into election officials’ networks by email attachments. We anticipate supporting legislation in 2019 to eliminate the option for overseas and service voters to utilize email ballot return.

After the passage of HB 2406 in 2018, county auditors are now required to perform at least one of four outlined post-election audits including the option to perform a risk-limiting audit. A risk-limiting audit limits the risk of certifying an incorrect election outcome. The other audit methods require that if discrepancies are found, there must be procedures to escalate the audit. We anticipate working with election officials and the Secretary of State to incorporate best practices in state rules and county procedures for post-election audits during 2019.

The League will work with legislators during the 2019 legislative session to improve election security by supporting:

- Improved cybersecurity measures to ensure our voting system can be defended against attacks.
- Elimination of email ballot return.
- Publicly verifiable post-election audits and easy and timely access to audit results.
- Improved reconciliation reports including greater detail of ballot rejection rates.
- Improved tracking and procedures for chain of custody of voted ballots.
- Public access to election records including ballot images and cast vote records when voter privacy and ballot anonymity can be maintained.

Additional Resources

- LWVUS Report on Election Auditing
<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/elections-tools/report-election-audits-task-force>
- NASEM Securing the Vote—Protecting American Democracy
<https://www.nap.edu/read/25120/chapter/1>

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