

# MY TURN, McCoy-Lawrence: Voters aren't getting voting system they deserve

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By Special to Statehouse Report



*Editor's Note: The State Election Commission announced this week it would spend \$51 million on a new statewide voting machine network. As offered in this space over the last year, the League of Women Voters closely watched the process and suggested other options. Here's a reaction to this week's news.*

*By Christe McCoy-Lawrence, exclusive to Statehouse Report | The League of Women Voters of South Carolina is, of course, distressed that the state has chosen to pay more money to get less of a voting system than what it could have obtained and than what the citizens of South Carolina deserve.*

We had hoped for a new voting system that was primarily hand-marked paper ballots scanned at the precinct. We know that such a system could have been acquired for about half the cost of the planned new system.

We had hoped for a system that would lead to shorter lines at the polling places. Reverting to hand-marked paper has been shown to reduce wait time for voters. South Carolina's wait times are often among the worst in the nation, and staying with an electronic system is likely

to ensure that long lines continue to be the norm.

We had hoped for a system that provided voter-verifiable ballots. With the new system, the election authorities will be able to provide a statistical verification of the results, but voters will not be able to ensure that their ballot choices will be counted as they see them on the printed paper.



We had hoped for a system that had in it as little software as possible. The vendor of the current system has twice been unable to write software without some errors that have led to votes being uncounted or miscounted. The new system uses the same vendor as the current system, and we will not know for some time (if ever) whether they have learned how to write correct software.

We had hoped for a system with as little electronic machinery as possible, because the maintenance cost for that hardware is a significant burden on the counties. Richland County, for example, has been paying more than \$100,000 per year in hardware maintenance costs. We do not know yet what the new fees will be, but this burden on the counties will continue to be a problem and will take money away from other important election needs.

We had hoped for a system that did not require the purchase of some 13,500 voting computers. That money could have been spent to improve poll worker training, polling place access, location, and accessibility, and a better overall experience for South Carolina voters. Instead, those funds will be unavailable for the general purposes of improving elections.

We had hoped that South Carolina voters could expect a better system, and thus a better election experience. Since a voting system has a projected lifespan of fifteen years, it seems that fulfilling that expectation may have to wait until 2034.

*Christe McCoy-Lawrence of Holly Hill is co-president of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina.*

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