

Commissioner Hovland Statement to the TGDC Regarding VVSG 2.0 Principle and Guidelines
Public Comments

January 15, 2020

The VVSG 2.0 Principles and Guidelines were submitted for a 90-day public comment period beginning on February 28, 2019 and closing on May 29, 2019. The original format to submit comments was to send an email to votingssystemguidelines@eac.gov. On May 2 and May 23 our servers received over five thousand emails with the following or similar subject line: “ban wireless; require hand-marked paper ballots”. In many cases, we received the same message from the same sender multiple times. At first it was thought to be a volumetric attack, targeting our network to overwhelm bandwidth capabilities. Our security devices stopped the messages at the server due to our bandwidth limitations and the volume and nature of the messages being received, as the messages were being transmitted within close proximity of time. Thousands of messages were being transmitted from other websites (at least 3 sites) that had been setup to automatically transmit to the EAC email address. Due to the circumstances outlined above, we changed the email address so that the messages didn’t shut down the EAC system. Within a few days, to further enhance the security of the process, we changed the format by which the public submitted comments from email submission to a secure web-form. To ensure the public had sufficient time to submit comments in light of these changes, the Commission voted to extend the public comment submission deadline until June 7, 2019.

Due to the technical complexity of the issue and the existence of many duplicate submissions, we had difficulty calculating the precise number of public comments submitted. An additional complicating factor was the existence of external websites that used prepopulated comment forms mapped to the VVSG comment email address.

A majority of the comments petitioned to ban wireless and required hand-marked paper ballots. Such comments were received mainly under two subject lines: “Please strengthen voluntary voting system guidelines” and “Secure our voting machines from hacking”. Among the submissions, we received a document from a commenter with the same theme that stated that 44,761 individuals concurred with the comment. The same commenter also submitted a spreadsheet with a compilation of 1,465 comments. We received approximately 50 other public comments on other aspects of the VVSG 2.0.

We have taken numerous steps to ensure we avoid this situation in the future, the EAC has implemented enhanced infrastructure, security devices and increased its bandwidth. We also have enhanced the comment process by utilizing regulations.gov to collect comments that ensures both accuracy and will allow us to avoid the circumstances outlined above.