

Testimony of Marci Andino, Executive Director, South Carolina Election Commission September 4, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to share my thoughts on how we can improve the voting process across the country. My testimony is based on my experiences in South Carolina, but includes similar challenges faced by election officials in other states as well.

Following the 2012 General Election, Charles Stewart surveyed more than 10,000 registered voters across the country and asked about their experience at the polling place. Approximately 33 percent reported that they had no wait at their polling places. The average wait time was 13 minutes, with the longest being 44 minutes and the shortest being under two minutes. In South Carolina, the average time wait time was 27 minutes.

The broad perspective of the Stewart survey does not seem to indicate much of a problem. But we know from our own experiences and from media reports that there were voters who waited much longer to cast their ballots. In South Carolina, we know some voters waited at least six hours in one precinct.

Just as wait times vary among the states, they are often dramatically different within a state or even within a county.

Because of this, the first step in improving the system is to define “acceptable wait time.”

The proposed SIMPLE Voting Act says no voter should be forced to wait in line to vote more than one hour. I am sure the voters who waited many hours to vote would be extremely pleased with an hour wait.

In South Carolina, we spent a considerable amount of time meeting with county election officials and analyzing audit data from the voting system and electronic poll books. Counties also gathered information from poll workers and voters.

So what are the causes of the long lines? In short, nearly everything CAN cause delays.

Lengthy ballots, voters not being familiar with ballot questions, a shortage of resources – both poll workers and voting machines, and address changes were all identified as factors that contributed to long lines. High turnout and numerous voters showing up at approximately the same time were also identified as factors.

Several factors can slow down the voter check-in process, including:

- Voter registration database problems
- Polling places not adequately staffed

- First-time voters showing required forms of identification
- Voters not on the voter registration list/wrong precinct
- Voters without proper photo identification
- Same day voter registration

The voting process itself can be confusing or cumbersome:

- Long ballots, especially those with numerous, long referenda
- Voters not familiar with the candidates or haven't read the referenda questions
- Voters not familiar with voting equipment
- Voters waiting to vote curbside or to use the ADA machine
- High turnout

Technology, if not properly deployed, can also cause delays:

- Not enough voting machines
- Voting machine(s) not working
- Not enough electronic poll books
- Electronic poll book issues at check-in
- Technology confusing to poll workers

Hundreds of thousands of poll workers are needed on election day to effectively run polling places. Poll workers are valuable resources, but they are basically volunteers who receive limited training, work a few days every other year and in some cases earn less than minimum wage. While this model for staffing polling places is necessary, it also creates issues such as:

- Not enough poll workers
- Inadequate training of poll workers
- Complex election laws governing who can vote that are confusing
- Uncomfortable with polling place technologies
- Lack of training documentation or reference manuals
- Late arrival or no shows

Finally, the physical location of polling places can present problems.

- Changing the location of a polling place
- Fewer or consolidated polling places
- Problems getting into polling places to set up
- Poor polling place layout
- Lack of organization
- Insufficient signage

So what can be done to address these issues? There are practical steps election officials can take to improve the voting process and reduce lines at polling places.

Election officials should review precinct size and ratios for assigning poll managers and voting equipment. Simply dividing a precinct because there was a line is not the solution. I don't believe there is a magic number of voters per precinct. The polling place will dictate how many voters can be assigned to a precinct because of geography and physical layout.

While information obtained from poll managers and voters is beneficial, the best information may come from the technologies you use in the polling places. Audit data from voting systems and electronic poll books is an important tool in reconstructing what happened, and when it happened, on election day.

There are opportunities to conduct time and motion studies in polling places, and to introduce queue management theories in poll manager training to improve the process of moving voters through the check in and voting process.

Other steps for election officials include: leveraging polling place technologies, utilizing a problem resolution table, employing effective ballot design techniques and increasing voter education efforts.

Some policy recommendations to consider:

There is not a "one-size fits all" solution to the issue of long lines. Guidelines should be established, but jurisdictions must be allowed to determine which solution best meets their needs. Every solution introduces a new set of challenges.

However, perhaps the most important step we can take is to provide more opportunities and more alternatives for voting. In most locations, while voting technologies may have changed, some procedures have been in place for a hundred years or more and must be examined in light of today's realities.

More opportunities for early voting should be considered, along with establishing vote centers. Early voting gives voters more opportunities to cast their ballot at their convenience. Voters are not forced to go to a polling place on one particular day.

Many of us don't work close to where we live. That's where vote centers can be beneficial. By allowing voters to cast their ballots in a convenient location, rather than requiring them to vote at a particular precinct, could reduce lines.

While electronic voting systems are not without controversy, there's no doubt that such systems make it easier and faster for a voter to cast a ballot and prevent voters from over voting and warn them about under votes. With constant improvements in technology, there

is no reason why we can't make these systems more secure and protect the integrity of the voting process.

Finally, though, addressing the problem of wait times comes down to a question of resources. The simple fact of the matter is, it will take money to invest in better and more secure technology, to recruit and adequately train poll workers and to expand opportunities for voters to participate in the election process.

Again, thank you for allowing me to be here, and I hope my participation is useful to you as you prepare your report and recommendations to the President.