

I want to thank the members of the Election Assistance Commission for the opportunity to talk about Rhode Island's experiences with our successful installation of our statewide central voter registration system— our CVRS. I hope our experience as one of the first states to complete the initial process can provide other states a road map to a successful implementation.

For the first time, Rhode Island has a central, statewide, voter registration system that allows cities and towns to maintain accurate voter lists helping to eliminate fraud and ensure the integrity of our elections. I believe there is nothing more important for the integrity of our elections than having an accurate voter list on Election Day.

Today I hope to highlight the actions my administration took to implement the CVRS in a manner that utilized the latest technology, ensured the accuracy of the lists and made best use of taxpayers' dollars.

My office had several goals in mind when developing the process for the procurement of a statewide computer voter registration list. Recognizing that the CVRS would be the cornerstone of the Rhode Island electoral process, our goal was to procure the best possible voter registration system available above and beyond compliance with HAVA mandates and state law. We recognized that this implementation would be a team effort and we wanted to involve the 39 local boards of canvassers as well as other representatives of Rhode Island communities in the process.

In anticipation of federal funds appropriated under HAVA, my office submitted legislation to the Rhode Island General Assembly that provided for a statewide database. The law also directed the Secretary of State to provide (1) All necessary hardware and software for the thirty-nine (39) local boards of canvassers to maintain their local voter

registration records; (2) All necessary hardware and software for the electronic integration of voter registration records from the division of motor vehicles; (3) All necessary hardware and software for the electronic integration of voter registration records from certain agencies processing voter registrations where the secretary of state finds that the number of registrations processed warrants the electronic integration; and (4) Additional terminals for access to the voter files as determined by the secretary of state.

This section of the law also stipulated that local boards would continue to have the responsibility and sole authority for any addition, correction, or deletion of information from their local voting records. The Office of the Secretary of State, or the designee of the secretary of state, would provide training and technical support for all local boards of canvassers in the operation and maintenance of their local voter registration system. The law did not take any authority or responsibility for the maintenance of local records away from the local boards.

Upon taking office, I created the HAVA Rhode Island Advisory Committee to assist in the writing of the HAVA State Plan. This committee was comprised of 75 individuals and went far beyond the minimum HAVA requirements for membership. The membership included a wide representation of stakeholders selected from all segments of the Rhode Island community. Our desire was to keep the process open and have input from as many groups as possible. Our State Plan filed in August 2003 called for the Secretary of State to begin the procurement process for a computerized statewide central voter registration system (CVRS) immediately.

## **PROCUREMENT PROCESS:**

Again, we understood that the 39 cities and towns in Rhode Island and the State Board of Elections would be critical partners in the implementation of the CVRS. My office invited local boards of canvassers and representatives from the State Board of Elections to serve on a review committee and make comments on the “request for proposal,” or RFP, as it was being drafted from July to September in 2003.

In order to procure the best system for the State, my office organized and conducted a vendor fair in September 2003 prior to issuing an RFP. Representatives from a dozen vendors participated in this 2-day event, attended by over 100 people, including state and local elected officials, local boards of canvassers, special interest groups and the public. Everyone who attended was asked to complete a questionnaire evaluating the systems demonstrated as an additional source of input.

Legal counsel was engaged to review the RFP in conjunction with state and federal law and to assure that the CVRS being purchased would meet all the HAVA requirements.

The RFP was issued on October 22, 2003 with responses from interested bidders due by November 26, 2003.

My office also led a Technical Review Committee comprised of representatives of local boards of canvassers and the State Board of Elections. This committee reviewed and scored the proposals submitted and held a full day of presentations for the top-scoring bidders.

At this point, the State’s Department of Administration worked with the vendor and my office to obtain best and final offers, and to negotiate the final language for the contract. A contract was awarded in March 2004 to Covansys Corporation.

## **INSTALLATION OF CVRS**

The contract, awarded to Covansys, included the development and installation of all hardware and software associated with the Rhode Island CVRS, as well as training of users and a support agreement.

In order to obtain the best prices possible, my office included the option in the RFP to purchase all hardware separately. The State has a Master Price Agreement with Dell Computer Corp. that enabled us to purchase hardware at a cost below that quoted by the vendor.

To assure that all 39 cities and towns would be connected to the web-based CVRS in a secure and efficient system, the Office of the Secretary of State assisted in the development of a private, high-speed state government network, RINET-MUNI and linked all of the CVRS users to this system. Our office could also provide better support and more efficient management of quality control by having one network instead of multiple Internet connections. Additionally, our office procured the services of a network specialist to install the workstations for each of the users in accordance with security procedures set forth by the Secretary of State's IT Department and in consideration of the specific and unique requirements of some of the local boards of canvassers.

In Rhode Island, all 39 cities and towns had maintained their voter registration data in separate and unique databases. In order to assure the accurate transfer of data, the Office of the Secretary of State contracted with vendors of the legacy systems, whenever possible, to standardize the legacy data for conversion into the new CVRS. We were able to successfully electronically convert the voter registration files for all 39 cities and towns as well as any voter history provided by the municipalities in less than a year.

Our vendor then reviewed all the street file information gathered from the 39 legacy systems in conjunction with state district lines, the Postal Service and the Census Bureau, thereby insuring that our new CVRS would have a standardized, complete and accurate street file so that every registered voter would always be assigned to the correct precinct.

This process discovered that legacy voter lists scattered across the state had over 14,000 errors, including people registered in the wrong precincts and even the wrong towns. Some of those errors included city and town precinct lines that were incorrectly drawn and address errors such as incorrect street numbers and misnamed streets. These corrections eliminated the opportunity for error by designating street names and the range of numbers from which the local board could choose when adding a voter.

## **FUNCTIONALITY OF THE CVRS**

The development of the functionality of the RI CVRS began in March and continued through August of 2004. Our office contracted with retired local election officials to assist in the testing of the CVRS functions. This task force of retired election officials worked in conjunction with the current users and my office to test the functionality of the system as each module was being prepared.

Rhode Island's CVRS is more than just a database listing registered voters. It is the tool for streamlining voter registration management that exceeded the functions of the legacy systems that were being replaced. Some of the highlights of this system are:

- All official communications with voters are now automatically generated and tracked by the CVRS.
- The reminder screens that local boards see will advise staff when one of their voters' records has been registered in another town. Inactive voters are tracked and after 2

federal elections have elapsed with no communication from the voter, reminder notices are generated to remove the voter.

- In Rhode Island, the Division of Motor Vehicles electronically submits all voter registration applications taken at DMV offices. The records appear on a CVRS reminder screen for the appropriate local board that in turn accepts or rejects the application.

The CVRS will continue to streamline voter registration and will ensure our voter rolls are accurate. It will allow local election officials to update voter registration information immediately as it is received at the municipal level and the system includes safeguards to ensure that voter registration records are accurate and up-to-date. I hope my testimony was helpful and will provide clarification and solutions to some of the issues CVRS presents.