

HJR 46: Study of Election Laws

Survey of County Election Administrators: Funding and Resource Issues

January 7, 2008

During the last two weeks of December, 39 county election administrators took part in an online survey designed to gather general information about the most pressing funding and resource issues they face in administering elections. The survey was conducted to help the State Administration and Veterans' Affairs Interim Committee assess whether to pursue any legislation or other actions that would mitigate the costs counties are experiencing.

The survey included the following questions:

- What financial costs of administering elections have grown most significantly in recent years?
 - This question listed the following choices: buying and maintaining required computer systems; buying and maintaining other voting equipment; printing ballots and other election materials; advertising; and other factors that the respondent could specify.
- Which of those costs are attributable to requirements established by state or federal laws?
- What are the most difficult resource issues you face in administering elections?
 - This question listed the following choices: obtaining election judges; finding enough polling places; ability to receive technical assistance with computer equipment; and other factors that the respondent could specify.
- Please list any ideas you have for steps that could be taken at the state level, through legislation or other means, to alleviate any of the issues you have identified.

Growth in Costs

While most respondents chose one factor or another, their general responses indicated that most counties feel costs have increased in most areas, largely because of new federal or state requirements. Responses to the question asking which costs have increased most significantly in recent years broke down as follows:

- Printing ballots and other election materials: 11
- Buying and maintaining other voting equipment: 11
- All of the above: 9
- Buying and maintaining required computer systems: 6
- Other: 1
- Advertising: 1

When combined, costs related to buying and maintaining voting equipment and related computer equipment garnered the most response from elections officials. Many of the responses mentioned the same equipment, even if the respondents placed them in different categories for the purposes of their responses. Several themes emerged in responses involving cost pressures in elections:

- The cost of programming the voting systems for each election is a relatively new cost that has increased overall election costs.
- The 2007 legislation requiring the full language of each ballot measure to be printed on the ballot is likely to increase the costs of printing ballots and of programming the AutoMark machines used by voters with disabilities.

- The counties are facing increased costs in maintaining equipment purchased with Help America Vote Act funds and sometimes do not have the expertise to solve problems with the equipment.

Some respondents noted that they also had to increase their staffs to make sure there were enough workers to handle provisional ballots and late registration, particularly Election Day-registration.

Resource Issues

Responses to the question asking about the resource issues causing difficulties broke down as follows:

- Obtaining election judges: 22
- Other: 9
- Finding enough polling places: 3
- Ability to receive technical assistance with computer equipment: 3

Many of the respondents felt the recent changes in voting equipment and laws, along with the heightened scrutiny given to election administration, are making it more difficult to retain election judges. They said many election judges are uncomfortable using the equipment and newer technologies, particularly when they do so only a couple of times a year.

Ideas for Assistance

The open-ended question allowing election administrators to offer ideas for legislation or other state assistance resulted in a range of ideas, with increased use of mail ballot elections mentioned most frequently. Some administrators offered more than one idea, while others did not offer specifics. The responses broke down as follows:

- Allow expanded use of mail ballot elections: 11
- Provide state funding to help with equipment, maintenance, or other costs: 5
- Modify the late registration provisions to eliminate Election-Day registration: 5
- Repeal the requirement to print full ballot initiative language: 3
- Limit the number of places at which AutoMark machines are provided: 2
- Allow the local election administrator (rather than county) to consolidate precincts: 1