

HB 316

Electoral Progress in Georgia

1. Under Republican leadership, our state has made tremendous strides in improving ballot access and voter participation for all groups in Georgia – and HB 316 is just the next step in continued progress.
2. In 2013, Georgia implemented online registration. In 2016, we became one of just 13 states to implement opt-out registration in partnership with DDS.
3. Today, we have a record number of registered voters (over 7 million), but the biggest improvements by far have been made in minority communities – with a 24% increase in minority registration since 2016.
4. Our state also has some of the most progressive policies for voter participation in the nation, including three weeks of early voting and 45 days of no-excuse absentee voting - and we have consistently broken turnout records for the last several elections.

Argument for Touchscreen-Marked Paper Ballots

1. Two things are very clear: first, Georgia must update and replace its seventeen-year-old voting system.
2. Second, our biggest concern must be selecting a system which best protects election integrity - guaranteeing both safe elections and accurate vote counts.
3. The touchscreen-marked paper ballot system outlined in the bill is the only system that brings Georgia's voters safe and accurate elections while also offering ease of use and the option to conduct post-election audits.
4. Touchscreen ballot-markers are the only solution which strikes a common-sense balance between security, accessibility, and transparency.
5. This is a measure overwhelmingly supported by local officials (94% of Election Board Supervisors) as well as the general public (79% of likely Georgia voters in a recent poll).
6. Touchscreen-marked paper ballots are also the most widely used method of voting in the United States (24 states use the touchscreen ballot-marking method), so Georgia will be in good company when it implements its new system

Bill Details: Touchscreen-Marked Paper Ballots

Security

1. Although opponents claim that modern technology is vulnerable to attack, Georgia's elections have never been hacked in seventeen years of using a machine-based system.
2. Touchscreen ballot-markers are carefully designed to prevent interference – which is why they are never connected to the internet and come equipped with external cabinetry that prevents physical tampering.
3. Moving Georgia backward to a pencil-marked ballot system means that elections could be tampered with by anyone with a pencil, since a stray mark can completely spoil a ballot and since an eraser can easily change someone's vote.
4. It is far easier to fortify and monitor a touchscreen ballot system than it is to systematically secure pencil-marked ballots.

Accuracy

1. A significant part of fair elections is ensuring every vote is counted as it was intended, but voter intent is often unclear when a voter uses pencil and paper to mark his or her vote.
2. With a pencil-marked ballot, county ballot review teams are forced to interpret stray and accidental pencil marks on improperly completed ballots – meaning that a voter may have their vote counted incorrectly or completely invalidated.
3. On the other hand, touchscreen ballot-markers leave absolutely no room for doubt of voter intent, since voters make a clear choice with the press of a button.
4. Touchscreen ballot-markers are the only method that ensures our election outcomes are not cast into doubt the way 'hanging chads' obscured Florida's 2000 election results.

Transparency

1. Not only do touchscreen ballot-markers provide the most secure and accurate elections, but they also provide ultimate peace of mind through an auditable paper ballot trail.
2. The paper ballot component of touchscreen ballot-markers enables voters to double-check their choices before casting their ballot and allows the counties to audit election results.

Accessibility

1. Georgia's voting system should be easy to use for all voters, and touchscreen ballot-markers are the most accessible and inclusive option for voters of all abilities.
2. Thanks to adjustable text size and large buttons, touchscreen ballot-markers are best situated to meet the needs of the handicapped and elderly, who comprise

12% of Georgia's population and who may have trouble holding a pencil or filling in small bubbles on paper.

3. Moreover, retaining the touchscreen element that Georgia's voters have used for close to two decades will significantly reduce confusion and promote continuity when the new system is implemented.

Cost

1. Although it is difficult to put a price on secure, accurate, and transparent elections - it is clear that pencil-marked ballots would force an unfunded mandate on local counties.
2. Whereas touchscreen ballot-markers are a one-time cost to the state, pencil-marked ballots must be purchased and stored by the counties for every election.
3. The cost for every primary, primary run-off, general, and general run-off election can quickly add up for counties and taxpayers alike.

Bill Details: Voter Access and Participation

Registration

1. Reforms in HB 316 will cut back on human error in the identification verification process that local elections boards conduct in conjunction with the Department of Driver Services, opening the door for eligible voters and engaging as many registered voters as possible in the democratic process.

Ballot Access

1. We're also pursuing reforms that lower barriers to access and keep our voters on the rolls for a longer period of time, so that even those who vote infrequently will be able to cast a ballot when they like.

Election Integrity

1. This legislation will open the door for Georgia to join ERIC (the Electronic Registration Information Center) – a multi-state information sharing network that will better enable us to track those who have moved, are deceased, or who are felons – shoring up existing security protocols and preventing bad actors from infiltrating our elections.

Senate Amendments:

1. Line 382 – 83: Added language to require that voting equipment be certified by the US Election Assistance Commission prior to purchase, lease, or acquisition.
2. Lines 487-492: Added language requiring signs be posted within the polling place to remind voters to verify their ballot prior to inserting into the scanner and that there are sample ballots available at the polls for review
3. Lines 553- 54: Added language to require the ballot marked and printed by the electronic ballot marker must include political party/body affiliation of the partisan candidates selected by the voter
4. Previous Section 33 that expanded the 2010 UOCAVA electronic ballot transmission pilot program law to include disabled electors has been completely removed from the bill. However, the pilot program for UOCAVA electors is still in existing Code.
5. Line 1229: Added language to require precertification tabulation audits by the November 2020 general election. Previously it only said “as soon as possible”. It still allows the audits to be conducted earlier if possible.

Concluding Points

1. HB 316 has incorporated suggested solutions from Democrat and Republican lawmakers alike.
2. This is a voter-centric piece of legislation which, at its core, looks for common-sense ways to expand access and ease of voting.
3. HB 316 is just the next step in a significant history of continuing to give more registered, eligible voters greater opportunity to vote while ensuring that our state is still protected against security risks.