



VerifiedVoting.org is a national non-partisan nonprofit organization which promotes transparent, reliable and publicly verifiable elections. We congratulate the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) for their thorough study on voting systems. TACIR's report presents a range of recommendations for improving the security and reliability of its voting systems, shown in context of the current state of systems nationally. Its report includes a discussion of many of the significant recent developments that have affected the debate about voting technology, notably the ground-breaking California "Top to Bottom Review" reports, the most comprehensive study of voting systems of its kind. Ohio is embarking upon a similar review of their state's voting systems, and Alaska is considering such a review.

VerifiedVoting.org strongly endorses many of the Commission's recommendations, which closely parallel positions that we have advocated since our inception. Key among those is that without voter-verified paper ballots, it is not practical to provide reasonable assurance of the integrity of electronic voting systems by any combination of design review, inspection, testing, logical analysis, or control of the system development process.

Recognizing that the paperless DREs used in 93 of Tennessee's 95 counties "allow no check on the electronically-generated count other than the same machines and software to recount the same electronically recorded votes," the Commission appears to support the adoption of a paper ballot optical scan voting system in conjunction with ballot marking devices, with which we agree strongly. Optical scan balloting systems are reliable and cost-effective, and with ballot-markers, more accessible than most DRE systems.¹

The Commission correctly notes that a paper ballot would facilitate another of their recommendations: mandatory post election audits. Such audits are routinely conducted in a number of other states and are neither difficult nor expensive to do; the benefits accrued in voter confidence and security are immeasurably greater than any costs involved.²

TACIR will also recommend that voting machine vendors be required to escrow all of their proprietary software so that it can be reviewed by experts, as well as strengthened security and pre-election testing, and parallel testing on Election Day. VerifiedVoting.org supports all of these suggestions, with the caveat that none of these can substitute for the implementation of voter-verified paper ballots and mandatory post-election audits of a portion of those paper ballots, in randomly selected jurisdictions, sufficient to ensure the accuracy of the outcome. Security measures and testing can and should be carried out in concert with the implementation of paper and audits.

In order to provide Tennessee with the most accessible and reliable range of options for voter-verified paper ballots, we urge the adoption of the recommendations contained in the TACIR studies and we further urge that the state promptly evaluate accessible ballot-marking systems for certification. These can offer a significantly wider range of assistive features than most DREs, allowing voters with disabilities and different language abilities to privately and securely mark a paper ballot which can then be scanned and counted with all other voters' ballots. They are federally qualified and in current use in thousands of jurisdictions around the U.S. We also strongly recommend that the use of direct recording electronic (DRE) voting machines for any purpose be strictly curtailed, as soon as alternate accessible systems can reasonably be put in place.

Finally, we commend TACIR for hearing from technical experts with a background in voting system security research and for also listening to the most important voice – that of the voters themselves. We would be pleased to provide additional information upon request.

¹ <http://www.verifiedvotingfoundation.org/downloads/Newvvpbcosts.pdf>

² VerifiedVoting.org's President Pamela Smith testified to the Elections Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives Committee on House Administration in March of 2007 regarding post-election audits. See <http://verifiedvoting.org/audits> and http://www.verifiedvotingfoundation.org/downloads/PamelaSmithTestimonyFinal_2007mar20.pdf for more information.