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TO: Travis County Commissioners Court
FROM: Dana DeBeauvoir
RE: Recommendation from Travis County Clerk's Election Study Group
Regarding Future Voting Systems

In April 2009, I convened the Travis County Clerk's Election Study Group with the task of evaluating Travis County's current voting system and making recommendations for a future system. This diverse 45-member group represents a wide variety of interests in our community. Members include representatives from different political parties, election workers, the League of Women Voters, the disability community, the business community, computer security experts, community organizations, the media, and the different government agencies who contract with the County Clerk for election administration. The committee also has professors of mathematics, computer science, education, government, and public policy from the University of Texas and the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

Their mission was defined as follows:

1. Ensure that Travis County voters have an accurate, fair, secure, transparent to the public, and accessible voting system.
2. Determine a minimum and maximum time range as to when replacement of the current voting system is necessary. When the voting system was purchased in 2002, it was assumed that the life of this type of technology was at least ten years.
3. Evaluate concerns regarding the existing electronic voting system and any other type of system that may be under consideration. These concerns include, but are not limited to, security; ease of use for voters; intent of voter issues; accessibility; accuracy of count; transparency to the public, and efficient use of taxpayer money to purchase, operate, and maintain a system.
4. Make recommendations to Commissioners Court regarding options for upgrading or replacing the current election system.

After many hours of study and discussion that included an extensive review of the system currently in use in Travis County, issues central to elections (for example: security, accuracy, transparency, accessibility, etc.), and voting systems available on the market now and for the future, the Study Group put forth a report and made recommendations to Commissioners Court. A summary of these recommendations is attached and a full copy of the report has also been provided to you.

The Study Group reports they are impressed with the operation of the Elections Division and particularly with the emphasis that is placed on voting security. While many have concerns about all-electronic voting in general, they find our office provides safeguards beyond those mandated by law, and incorporates numerous practices that minimize risk. Because of how Travis County has implemented electronic voting, the Group states they believe it is at least as secure from most risks as other systems currently in use, even those that incorporate a paper ballot.

Significantly, the recommendations state that Travis County should move away from an all-electronic voting system to a system that has a paper ballot with an electronic count. This should be done as soon as an acceptable alternative is available on the market. After reviewing systems on the market, the Study Group found that there was not a system that currently meets with their approval.

The Study Group asked me to work to influence the development of new election systems and to research what future election systems may look like. We accepted this challenge and presented our findings to the Study Group on October 13, 2010. In brief, we learned that vendors are planning new products that will likely meet the requirements of the Group. We also discovered alternative approaches that deserve further scrutiny, including emerging activity to have publicly held, open source voting software. However, for all of these new products, we found that the new systems under development are not expected to be completed and to have received federal and state certification until after the 2012 Presidential Election.

After this discussion, the Group considered the following options:

Option 1: Continue with our current system as is until a new system can be purchased.

Under this option, we would continue to use our all-electronic voting system until the purchase process for a new system can be completed and implemented. For Travis County to get the best system possible, it is likely that implementation of a new system cannot be completed in time for the 2012 Presidential Election. This does mean that we can continue with our plan of moving toward the use of vote centers* for the November 2011 election.

**The County Clerk's Office with the support of the Commissioners Court has been working for the past several years to position themselves to implement the vote-center concept. Vote centers are election day polling locations that operate similarly to early voting locations. On election day, voters could vote at any polling place instead of only at the precinct where they are registered to vote. Texas Law provides that under this scenario the total number of polling places could be reduced by up to 50 percent. An extensive program of community involvement and public hearings would help determine the number and locations of these polling places.*

Option 2: Continue forward on the plan to purchase a new system but implement an interim hybrid solution.

Under this option, we would use our existing electronic system for early voting and utilize paper ballots with precinct ballot counters on election day. We anticipate we could have this interim solution in place by the November 2011 election with likely continued use for the Presidential election in 2012. Under this scenario, the implementation of vote centers would have to be delayed until we purchase a new system around 2013 (because of the massive amounts of paper ballots that would have to be stocked at each vote center, the vote-center concept and utilization of paper ballots with precinct ballot counters are not compatible). The cost for adding precinct ballot counters in each election day polling place would be approximately \$1.2 million.

The Travis County Clerk's Election Study Group voted overwhelmingly to support Option 1 with the condition that, while vote centers are supported for implementation by the November 2011 election, Travis County should maintain its current, full complement of polling places, and that careful consideration should be given before any reduction of election day polling locations are done in the future.

The Study Group expresses appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this study of election systems and processes.

Please let me know if you have any questions.