



EDITORIAL

AUGUST 15, 2023

**VOTE CENTERS:**

**THE SCOURGE THAT WILL PREVENT HAND-MARKED PAPER BALLOTS FROM BEING ADDED TO A COUNTY'S VOTE SYSTEM WITHOUT ALSO ADDING MORE UNTRUSTWORTHY VOTING MACHINES**

After a protracted tussle with citizens, on June 12, 2023, Williamson County Commissioners approved funding for new voting equipment for the county -- 200 ballot marking devices (BMDs), 70 scanners/tabulators, a high-speed tabulator, 145 new software/printers and other assorted software, equipment and licenses. Part of the deal, though, was a promise by the Williamson County Election Commission (WCEC) to implement "a feasibility study concerning the addition of hand-marked ballots" to our county's voting process.

But after securing commissioners' blessing for machines, that agreement has just been thrown out the window. And it's something of which all Tennessee counties should take note.

As the WCEC began discussions about the hand-marked paper ballot (HMPB) feasibility study and its scope of work, the election commission suddenly announced a new prerequisite they said had to be in place before they could bring in hand-marked paper ballots (HMPBs), a stipulation not shared with County Commissioners during their May and June votes for approval. The election commission required the addition of another new machine -- 25 "ballot-on-demand" printers at a cost of almost a half million dollars.

All because we vote in vote centers -- voting locations across a county that allow county voters to vote in any of its "convenience" vote centers instead of in an assigned precinct.

Interestingly, taking the easy, inexpensive step of moving voters BACK to voting in PRECINCTS, instead of keeping us in internet-heavy VOTE CENTERS that demand even more machines, is nowhere on the election commission's radar.

FACT: Hand-marked paper ballots as a voting option are much safer, more secure ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) and not dependent on a multitude of machines if voters vote in precincts. Not so if they vote in vote centers.

Vote centers require an internet connection between each center so voters can't vote hop from center to center. The connection is supposedly protected by a VPN, but [here are ten studies that prove how vulnerable VPNs are today against nefarious hackers](#). Vote centers require ballot marking devices (BMDs), which are equally vulnerable as proven by [these nineteen studies, as well as documented by poll watchers](#). Yes, BMDs create a paper ballot. But the voter's vote choices are encased in a bar code or QR code that is read by the tabulator but can't be read and the vote verified by voters in the voting booth. The voter's intent is not truthfully discernable. [So, voters don't really have a voter-verifiable paper audit trail for their ballots.](#)

Oh, yeah, they fly in the face of the Tennessee Constitution (Article IV, Section I).

The election commission's argument that vote centers have increased vote turnout [doesn't jibe with the data found on the Tennessee Secretary of State's website, either](#). In the last twenty years, election turnout has been relatively flat, with the highest Williamson County turnout found in the November 2004 election. Nineteen years ago, when we voted in precincts.

The county's election commission has also taken our 43 precincts in which we voted and squeezed voters into 25 vote centers. So, since 2019, the commission has jammed 12% more county citizens and 19% more registered county voters into 42% less voting locations.

No wonder we're seeing longer lines to vote, many of which have disenfranchised voters because some citizens don't have hours upon hours to wait in voting lines and have left these "convenience" vote centers without voting. Since you can't predict turnout, adding more BMDs to a vote center is a lazy, bureaucratic, costly solution to the problem.

If HMPBs are ADDED and vote centers RETAINED, all 25 centers in the county will need to have enough paper ballots on hand to address races from throughout the county. That could mean 100 or more different versions of hand-marked paper ballots in each center. A chain-of-custody nightmare. WCEC wants ballot-on-demand machines to print ballots at each vote center in its place.

However, if instead we can move back to safer, more secure precinct voting, we could easily add hand-marked paper ballots as an option with each precinct likely having only one ballot. Plus, voter wait time is reduced as only a limited number of voters can vote at a precinct and more voters can skip over time-consuming BMDs and mark their paper ballots with a pen in far more privacy booths. No need for ballot-on-demand printers.

Williamson County is already a billion dollars in debt and the last thing county commissioners will want to see as a result of the HMPB feasibility study is the election commission with their hand out requesting a half million more dollars for more voting machines. We know that much money is not in the commission's budget. And since the state has already given the county almost three million dollars in 2019 and 2023 for voting machines, I bet the welcome mat at that trough is long worn out.

The Williamson County Election Commission knows all that.

And after presenting their HMPB feasibility study with the caveat that we continue voting in vote centers, this move meant for greater election integrity, transparency and returning trust in our county's voting process is dead on arrival. Sounds like Congress, doesn't it?

It's obvious this precondition of adding ballot-on-demand printers is purposefully meant to ensure HMPBs won't be feasible. Because the election commission:

- Won't choose a true "independent" firm for this HMPB feasibility study because they don't want paper ballots but, instead, want a study that will support BMDs -- their preferred voting solution which they've TELEGRAPHED for the last two years.

- Won't move us back to precinct voting, which would make HMPBs easy and safer to initiate while reducing the crowding, internet requirements, costs and other problems of vote centers.
- Will recommend the purchase of more machines at a cost of \$475,000 as their solution for adding HMPBs, knowing the cost will almost certainly not fly with the county, nor their own department budget, nor with the state.

The WCEC will have staved off HMPBs. Despite what one commissioner told the election commission on June 12th: "You heard the people... they want hand-marked paper ballots... so give them hand-marked paper ballots!"

This is how un-elected bureaucrats running many of our state's election commissions work. So, voters, you better take note and never let the vote center camel stick its nose under your tent. You'll never get it out.

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