



**THE VOTE CENTER DILEMMA:
THE VOTING ISSUE THAT WILL PREVENT HAND-MARKED PAPER BALLOTS IN OUR ELECTIONS.
First in a series**

The ramifications of the 2020 and 2022 national elections have left an indelible mark on American consumer confidence in elections. Problems such as machine vulnerabilities, the misconduct of vote center workers, ballot drop boxes and ballot harvesting, as well as illegal voting law revisions, all caused a deep fissure in citizen trust in how elections are run.

Here in Franklin, where seven of nineteen Dominion tabulators glitched and mis-counted votes on the tabulator tapes in the [October 2021 municipal election](#), consumer concern heightened. The Dominion voting machines were jettisoned and the problem was named: The “Tennessee Error,” [anointed by cybersecurity and IT experts](#) who documented the problem. ES&S machines, which are just as precarious, replaced Dominion.

An April 2023 Rasmussen poll reported that nationwide, 60% of likely U.S. voters think it probable that cheating affected the outcomes of some races in 2022’s midterm elections. A similar percentage believes the same thing happened in the 2020 election. Both affirm the huge loss of confidence in our nation’s – and county’s – voting process.

Invariably, one of the top election integrity concerns cited today in numerous sources ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), for instance) has been the use of **voting machines** in our elections.

That has motivated citizens to request **hand-marked paper ballots (HMPBs)** be added into our election process. The reason? The ballot marking devices (BMDs) on which voters are forced to mark their ballots have been [proven to be highly vulnerable](#) and hide voter intent in an un-human-readable bar code or QR code. Paper ballots can counter the effect BMDs have on our elections.

Plus, voter intent is crystal clear on hand-marked paper ballots because voter selections are actually marked by a voter, not a machine.

And because the election day tabulator, which counts our votes and is mandated by Tennessee law to do so, has the ability to spit mis-marked ballots back out for the voter to correct, hand-marked paper ballots are even more popular throughout the county. [More than 68% of US voters vote on hand-marked paper ballots](#) (with a BMD available for ADA purposes).

But here’s the rub.

Williamson County voters vote in **vote centers** and vote centers [will almost certainly keep HMPBs out of our voting process](#).

In essence, vote centers are a voting experiment in Williamson and a few other Tennessee counties where registered voters can vote on election day in any of a number of locations spread out across the county. Vote centers are convenient because of the increased options of places to vote, but they are far less secure.

And many voters don't seem to realize that.

If we can't be moved back into precinct voting, which Williamson County did until the spring of 2020, it will be almost impossible to bring hand-marked paper ballots back in to address machine concerns. Because bringing HMPBs into a vote center environment means that a paper ballot for every one of possibly 100-150 races in an election from throughout the county has to be available for every voter in every vote center. In precincts, there should probably be only one ballot needed, not hundreds.

Think of those unused ballots sitting in a corner of a vote center. A chain of custody, security and cost nightmare. And the election commission's answer? Keep vote centers and bring an entirely new machine system called ballot-on-demand to our voting process instead of just moving us back to precincts.

Even worse, vote centers require an internet connection, resulting in [additional security concerns](#).

Also, voters in vote centers are forced to mark their ballots on ballot marking device (BMDs) machines. There are a [host of studies proving the untrustworthiness](#) of BMDs.

Recently, the GOP's Republican National Committee (RNC) stepped into the election integrity fray, issuing an important resolution they titled "[Return to Excellence in American Voting](#)." It documented eleven problems they and American consumers have tracked from these elections and an equal number of solutions. Removing [vulnerable machines](#) from our voting process, bringing [hand-marked paper ballots](#) into voting precincts and returning us to precinct voting vs. [vote center voting](#) are just a few.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be focusing on these issues, especially the threats to your vote because of vote centers that you probably didn't know about. All in the hope that these issues that endanger the votes of Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike can be addressed and that loss of confidence in our country's and county's elections can be remedied.

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[Tennessee Voters for Election Integrity](#)