



**THE VOTE CENTER DILEMMA:
WHY HAND-MARKED PAPER BALLOTS ARE SUCH A BIG DEAL
Second in a series**

Last week we examined how recent elections across the nation and in Williamson County have resulted in a loss of confidence in the voting processes, machines, and even the commissions charged with ensuring our elections are transparent, safe and fair. [Here's](#) that installment.

So why are **hand-marked paper ballots** so important to so many voters? More than 68% of Americans [vote on them instead of ballot marking devices \(BMDs\)](#). Less than a third vote on BMDs. How come?

Because voting machines can't be trusted to be accurate.

BMD-created ballots are produced on a machine and have a bar code at the top. The voter's [candidate choices on the ballot are encased in that bar code](#). When the ballot goes into the scanner/tabulator, the machine reads only the bar code, NOT the list of voter selections that are printed on the ballot. No voter can read that bar code to ensure their choices are there.

In addition, no one is allowed to inspect unimpeded the scanner/tabulator which counts the ballots to ensure there are [no wireless components](#) or [errant software or malware](#) that's been inserted into the machine that could change bar-coded votes. In fact, BMDs have been proven by experts [to be exceptionally vulnerable](#).

Recall that all nineteen of the Dominion tabulators in the October 2021 Franklin municipal election were tested and deemed to be safe and secure... [before seven of the machines stopped counting votes on the tabulator tape during election day](#). The Secretary of State performed a post-election inspection with the Election Assistance Commission and its two inspection labs, [but none could pinpoint the problem's root cause](#). Dominion later affirmed there was [erroneous code in the system](#) that affected the BMDs and tabulators. So, how did that get in there?

After problems like these, how can voters trust the ballots that are [created by machines](#)?

What is not shared with voters is how risky the BMDs are. Yet, here's the ES&S senior vice president of security (whose voting machines we now use) [affirming in Congressional testimony that voting machines can be hacked](#). Here are nineteen [studies asserting various provable risks in using BMDs](#) to mark ballots. And here is cybersecurity expert J. Alex Halderman strongly [recommending against BMD use](#) based on his extensive study of Georgia's election.

The risk of BMDs is completely neutralized with **hand-marked paper ballots (HMPBs)**.

Unlike with BMDs, with HMPBs the VOTER makes his selections on the paper ballot so he knows exactly who he selected when the ballot goes into the tabulator to be counted. If an errant mark on the ballot causes the tabulator to reject the ballot, it can immediately be corrected by the voter. His intent is precise. SECURITY VERSUS CONVENIENCE.

[Election experts prefer hand-marked paper ballots](#). Plus, the [National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine \(pages 6 and 79\)](#) has affirmed that paper ballots are the preferred standard that should be used in elections. You can't hack paper and, as opposed to machines, paper doesn't require programming or extensive testing to work safely and securely. According to cybersecurity expert Capt. Seth Keshel, "the (current machine) system itself is obviously designed to be so complicated that it requires confidence in government to adjudicate winners and losers."

Paper is [state of the art](#) and ballots today have actually taken technology – such as anti-counterfeiting US currency strategies -- and [moved them into paper ballots](#) to make them safer.

In addition, using hand-marked paper ballots breaks the monopoly that a voting machine vendor has on a county's voting process. In Williamson County, we must use the vendor's ballot paper, its ballot-producing machine to write the voter's correct precinct on the ballot, its ballot-marking device to mark the ballot bar code containing candidate selections, its scanner to scan the bar code, its tabulator to tabulate the votes, its USB stick to track all votes on the tabulator and its election management system to compile all votes from throughout the county. The vendor controls a huge election monopoly!

Smart businesses don't put all their supplier eggs in one basket, they diversify. Using hand-marked paper ballots from another vendor would remove at least three of the seven control points that the vendor has over our election.

Removing the BMDs, which have been [proven to be the holdup in the voting process](#), and replacing them with double or triple the number of privacy voting booths and pens, will more than adequately handle an overwhelming flow of voters in a vote center or precinct, as well as reduce costs.

A recent resolution from the GOP's Republican National Committee (RNC) titled "[Return to Excellence in American Voting,](#)" affirms a number of improvements that have been monitored in voting processes nationwide – including adding hand-marked paper ballots -- can bring greater security and transparency into our voting process.

Because BMD [voting machines are risky](#), voters are clamoring for a better, safer way to mark their ballots. Hand-marked paper ballots are an answer experts have thoroughly endorsed and citizens have approved.

Next, we'll explain why a vote center environment makes the use of HMPBs almost impossible in our county.

Frank Limpus
[Tennessee Voters for Election Integrity](#)

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