

Fayette County's New Voting System

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are we changing the way we vote? What's wrong with the voting system we've been using?

A: Our voting system has served us well for over 38 years, but the federal government passed the Help America Vote Act on October 29, 2002. The Act mandated the availability of voting systems that are accessible to persons with disabilities, including those who are blind, in each polling site by January 2006. Furthermore, it prohibited the use of punch card and lever systems in federal elections.

Q: Why was a DRE voting system selected?

A: Our new Hart Voting System has the three qualities that are essential in a voting system and to meet the new federal requirements. It is accurate, secure, and very accessible to all voters, even those who are blind, visually impaired or who have limited or no mobility. It also meets the requirement for "second-chance voting" by presenting voters with a summary page showing how they have voted in each race and from which voters may go back into the ballot to make changes. It eliminates the possibility of over voting which is marking too many selections within a race, causing that race to not count.

Q: How was the eSlate system chosen?

A: The Fayette County Board and Elections along with the election staff invited voting equipment vendors to participate in two separate public demonstrations. Poll workers and other members of the community viewed the systems and provided comment. Ultimately, the Hart Voting System was selected.

Q: How much did the new system cost?

A: Officials have signed a contract for approximately \$1.2 million to purchase the new voting system. This price includes all voting equipment and software for in-person voting and a new system for absentee voters. The purchase price is offset by an estimated \$1.1 million in federal funds coming to the Fayette County as part of the Help America Vote Act. Hart will assist with implementation, maintenance services, voter education and outreach, and comprehensive training for election staff and all poll workers.

Q: Will voters have a chance to try out the new system before they vote on it?

A: Yes. Voters will have a chance to take the new equipment for a test spin. The equipment will be available daily at the Election Bureau office in the Public Services Building located at 22 E Main Street, Uniontown for those wanting to come try it out. Additionally, groups may contact the Election Bureau to request a "How to Vote Using the eSlate" video and instructional fliers to use for meetings. You may also take the eSlate for a spin by going to <http://www.hartintercivic.com/files/eSlate.swf> or access the video or a slideshow about using the new system through our web site, <http://www.FayetteVotes.org>.

Q: Is the new system based on a touch screen, like some ATMs?

A: No. In order to provide our voters with a reliable interface, we selected a system with a rotary optical encoder. The voter turns a wheel to navigate through the ballot, and, after highlighting his or her choice, presses a button marked **ENTER** to mark his or her vote. This interface was chosen because it is more accurate and durable than touch screen systems, and voters with limited or no vision or limited mobility skills also find the system very easy to use. It is more durable and costs less to store and maintain, thus lowering the cost of the system over the life of its use.

Q: I have never been able to vote without someone helping me. Will someone be there to help me with this new system?

A: Yes. Someone will be there to help you, but the system is designed to help you vote without assistance. There is an audio ballot reader that can help if you have problems with your eyesight or difficulties reading the ballot for other reasons, and a special **HELP** button is available if you have a question. When you press **HELP** once, on-screen instructions appear. If you press it twice, a poll worker will come to assist you.

Q: How can we be sure this system is working as it should?

A: Before any vote is cast, there is a process of testing the machines to be sure they are working as expected. This process, known as logic and accuracy testing, allows election officials to be sure votes are counted as they are cast.

Q: How do I know that the way the voting system recorded my vote is the same way I intended to cast my vote?

A: After you have voted in the last contest on the ballot, a Ballot Summary screen will appear listing all the choices you have made, and it will let you know if you missed voting in any race. Although you may change your selections at any time, you may also make corrections from the Ballot Summary screen to make sure your votes are counted the way you want them to be. When you are finished reviewing your ballot, press the **CAST BALLOT** button to put your ballot into the ballot box.

Q: Does the system have a paper trail?

A: Yes. Election officials can print all cast vote records to paper should they be required to do so. At this time, however, the State of Pennsylvania does not require a voter verifiable paper trail that can be printed and viewed by the voter at the polling place. If Pennsylvania lawmakers pass a law mandating such a requirement, Fayette County, like all Pennsylvania jurisdictions, will comply. Our voting system will support this capacity should it be required.

Also know that election officials have always and will always ensure votes are recorded correctly, by testing the voting system programming and validating it before and after the election – in the presence of witnesses – to ensure that votes are counted and reported as they are cast, through a process known as logic and accuracy testing. There are many other security features – both in process and in equipment and software – built into each election.

Q: What if a recount is necessary?

A: If required, the new system can provide election officials with a paper Cast Vote Record. This Cast Vote Record provides a means of recounting votes and ensuring that results are accurate. Officials can also compare the vote totals in the three separate vote storage locations to ensure they match.

Q: How do I know my votes are private and that there is not a database in the computer somewhere that records how I have voted?

A: There is no way for the system to tie your vote to you. When you vote, there is no identifying information recorded with your vote. You will be given a randomly generated four-digit access code that tells the eSlate which ballot races you should receive based on your precinct number. But the access code is not associated with your name. Therefore, it is impossible to trace your vote.

Q: What if I change my mind or make a mistake after I have pressed the **ENTER button?**

A: A voter can change any vote at any time until the **CAST BALLOT** button is pressed and you see the American flag waving on the screen. To change a vote, just use the wheel to

highlight the candidate you want to vote for and then press the **ENTER** button. The earlier vote is erased, and the new vote is recorded. Do NOT press **CAST BALLOT**, however, until you are finished voting.

Q: What if I don't want to vote in a particular race?

A: Then you don't have to. It is your decision and right to choose not to vote in any race. Just use the wheel to scroll past the race you want to skip. After you have voted in the last contest on the ballot, a Ballot Summary screen will appear listing all the choices you have made and will let you know if you missed voting in any race. You will see a list of the votes you have cast, and any skipped races will be noted with *No Selection* highlighted in red. You can go back and vote in the skipped race or press the **CAST BALLOT** button to submit your ballot as is.

Q: What if I accidentally vote twice in a race? Will my vote be discarded?

A: The system will not let you vote twice unless the contest specifically states a number greater than one can be selected.

Q: How do I know that my vote has been cast and counted?

A: Whenever a voter presses the **CAST BALLOT** button and the waving American flag appears, the vote is cast and counted. If desired, the voter can present their access code to the poll worker operating the machine that generated the code. Using the code, the poll worker can look up the status and print a receipt showing the code has been "assigned and cast." Again, the system only recognizes the code. It does not know who used the code.

Q: If the power fails or if there is some other computer failure will my vote be lost?

A: No. Your vote cannot be lost once you have pressed **CAST BALLOT** and see the waving American flag. Your votes are stored in three separate places with non-volatile memory. All data is protected and cannot be lost in the unlikely event that the system fails. The system also has a battery back-up that immediately engages if an electrical failure should occur. The batteries will operate for 18 hours of continuous use.

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