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Securing the Vote: Protecting American Democracy

Travis County Clerk Dana DeBeauvoir announces the recent release of a collaborative report Securing the Vote: Protecting American Democracy by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). As one of the co-authors, Ms. DeBeauvoir says the report has 41 recommendations for making elections more secure and auditable. First and foremost, the authors agree: all new voting systems must have a human-readable paper ballot trail by 2020 (Recommendation 4.11).

Some of the most important recommendations contained in the report are:

4.1: Improve protections for Voter Registration databases, which are internet connected, including better scanning and assessments of intrusion attempts, plans for better database integrity, and coordination with the U. S. Department of Homeland Security now that elections has been declared critical infrastructure.

5.8: Within the next 10 years, states should mandate Risk-Limiting Audits after every election using the paper ballot trail.

5.11: At the present time, the Internet should not be used for the return of voted ballots because there is no known technology which can guarantee the secrecy, security, and verifiability of a marked ballot over the Internet.

The report, which may be downloaded here, also calls for more research, better compilation and sharing of best practices in election security, and a stable and reasonable funding plan for periodic replacement of voting equipment, tabulation equipment, and Voter Registration systems from state and federal sources.

The NASEM Report and Voting System Security in Travis County

Travis County recently purchased a new voting system, with implementation projected for 2019. “With our new voting system, voters get best of both worlds—the speed and accuracy of an electronic voting system coupled with a paper trail” said DeBeauvoir. “It provides federally-required support for voters with disabilities in their right to cast a secret and independent ballot, and allows us to continue our robust Early Voting and Election Day Vote Centers – programs voters love.” DeBeauvoir added, “The system allows for fast, accurate election night reporting, and contains a paper trail that provides physical proof that ballots were cast as intended and counted as cast. Moreover, with this investment in voting security, we will be able to implement some of the recommendations of the NASEM report, such as Risk Limiting Audits.”

Implementation will begin in the next few months with a county-wide training program for voters and election workers during summer 2019. County Clerk Elections plans to use the new voting system for the first time in the November 2019 Constitutional Amendment election.

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