

**U.S. Committee on House Administration
2020 Election Security - Perspectives from Voting System Vendors and Experts**

**Donald Palmer, Commissioner
United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC)
January 9, 2020**

Good morning Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the committee. I'm thankful for the opportunity to testify before you this morning on the important work being done by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in preparation for the 2020 federal elections. As prescribed by the Commission's enabling legislation, the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), the EAC is focused on assisting state and local election officials across the United States in providing secure, accessible, and accurate elections. Under that act, the EAC works to implement election reforms, assist states in certifying voting systems, advance voting accessibility, disperse HAVA funds, and serve as a clearinghouse of election information and best practices in the laboratory of states. In pursuit of this mission, we collaborate closely with state and local election officials, federal partners, and others in the elections community. I am grateful that the expert and vendor witnesses testifying before you today have shared their insight on the important topics of election security.

I would like to begin by thanking Congress for your recent efforts to increase funding in this area. The addition of \$425 million in HAVA grant funds with a 20% state match will go a long way toward enhancing election technology and improving security in state and local elections. Simultaneously, the 40% increase in the EAC budget will allow us to bolster existing programs and enhance resources. I should note the EAC's distribution of \$380 million in 2018 HAVA funds to states in the lead up to the 2018 midterms was, and continues to be, critically important to helping officials secure elections infrastructure.

Before discussing the hard work currently underway at the EAC, I would first like to highlight an important update to our Testing and Certification Program that occurred late last year. As the committee may already be aware, the Testing and Certification Program Manual allowed for minor – or de minimis – software changes without the overhead of a full-blown voting system certification testing campaign. Our goal is to be nimble as possible in working with manufacturers to quickly respond to a rapidly changing threat environment. While this procedure has existed for a number of years, it became clear during the Commission’s public forum on Election Security last August that the guidelines and procedures around these changes were not clear to a number of key stakeholders in the community including vendors, testing laboratories, and state election officials performing state certification. So, in November of 2019, the EAC’s Testing and Certification Program issued a Notice of Clarification providing clear guidelines on submitting these minor software changes for certification. The EAC expects that this process will be used often by vendors to rapidly update the security of their systems with the latest software patches and operating system updates.

Tremendous progress was also made in 2019 toward the adoption of Voluntary Voting System Guidelines (VVSG) 2.0. The VVSG 2.0 represents a significant leap forward in defining standards that will serve as the template for the next generation of secure and accessible voting systems. The hard work of the NIST staff, and EAC staff culminated in presentations of draft requirements to the Technical Guidelines Development Committee. The Committee is now considering their recommendations to the EAC on adoption. My fellow commissioners and I are committed to a transparent and thorough deliberation on the path to implementing VVSG 2.0. The EAC Standards Board and the Board of Advisors will meet in April 2020 to consider these

new requirements. After their key input, it is my hope that the VVSG 2.0 will be finalized and voted on over the upcoming months.

As the nation focuses on the 2020 election this year, so too does the EAC. Our #2020Focus campaign kicks off with the 2020 Election Summit at the National Press Club next Tuesday, January 14th. The Summit will bring together election officials and experts in election security and accessibility. Topics for discussion include the security environment, the need for enhanced poll worker training, and ensuring accessible elections. Moving forward, we look forward to keeping you and the public informed through our website and Twitter feed. These will be updated throughout the year with new election administration information and best practices gathered from our partners and developed internally in our research, clearinghouse, and testing and certifications programs.

The increased fiscal year 2020 appropriations for the EAC will allow us to fill critical staffing vacancies within the agency as well as bolstering our staff to meet rising demands. I am pleased to report that the EAC is in the process of identifying candidates for a new General Counsel and additional communications personnel. The statutory process of identifying candidates for Executive Director is also well underway. The EAC plans to hire staff across the agency. Specifically, we also plan to add staff in our Testing and Certification Program. Expansions to this program will enhance its capability of handling frequent voting system security updates through the de minimis process while fulfilling its other duties of conducting training for election administrators, performing on-site audits of voting system manufacturing and test lab facilities, and overseeing a Risk-Limiting Audit assistance program.

As a former Naval Intelligence Officer, I understand the critical importance of establishing clear lines of communication and confidence in responding to cyber threats. The EAC is uniquely positioned to serve as a trusted partner assisting in this role.

HAVA set forth an ambitious agenda for the EAC, one rooted in protecting the very foundation of our nation's democracy. Despite very real and persistent resource challenges in recent years, the EAC has faithfully fulfilled its obligations and even expanded the support it provides to election administrators and voters. With strong support from Congress in the recent appropriations cycle and the reestablishment of a quorum of Commissioners, the EAC is ready for its next chapter. We look forward to working with Congress as we continue our efforts to help America vote. I am happy to answer any questions you may have following today's testimony.