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**Testimony to Presidential Commission on Election Administration
September 20, 2013**

Cook County Clerk David Orr

First, I want to thank the members of the Commission for inviting me to testify. I think your work is very important and I hope it has a dramatic impact on the future of elections.

My name is David Orr, and I am the County Clerk for Cook County, Illinois. We manage elections for 1.4 million voters in suburban Cook County, which includes 126 municipalities and about 600 other units of government. We have one of the longest and most complex ballots in the country, with 2,700 candidates and 800 ballot styles and 993 contests in our April 2013 election.

You have already heard testimony in favor of many policies we have in suburban Cook County -- Early Voting, no-fault Mail Voting and electronic pollbooks. Rather than repeat the benefits of those previous recommendations, I will endorse them. These practices take pressure off polling places on Election Day by giving voters more options or by making precincts more efficient.

In my testimony I will explore the following:

- ✓ Weekend and holiday voting;
- ✓ Access to schools and optimal voting locations;
- ✓ Harvesting data through our Automated Call Form;
- ✓ Data-driven planning;
- ✓ Online mail ballot requests;
- ✓ Online voter registration; and
- ✓ A national online Voter Information Tool.

Weekend/Holiday Voting

The day of the week an election is held has a direct effect on voter participation, pollworker availability, and thus, on lines. Tuesday is an **inconvenient** day for everyone. Weekend or holiday voting, which I favor, would expand the pool of available pollworkers, remove time conflicts with the workday, and enhance election authorities' ability to use important brick-and-mortar assets: public buildings. Altogether, these factors would enhance the voter experience, help reduce lines and hopefully, boost turnout.

Optimal Voting Locations: Schools and Public Buildings

Election authorities need access to schools, park districts and other public buildings to hold efficient elections. Public schools in particular often have the right attributes to make elections run more smoothly, including:

- ✓ Accessible entrances;
- ✓ Modern wiring;
- ✓ Internet connectivity;
- ✓ Adequate space;
- ✓ Sufficient lighting; and
- ✓ Good geographic distribution.

Plus, schools have classrooms and chairs to accommodate voters who must wait to vote or to complete paperwork.

Undisputed access to schools is an added benefit of holding elections on a weekend or a holiday. Removing students from the equation addresses concerns about security, traffic and overcrowding. If Election Day remains on Tuesday, I strongly believe that non-attendance days for students are essential for elections, whether schools are closed to everyone or superintendents opt for an Institute Day.

Harvesting Data: Automated Call Form

Knowledge is power, and when it comes to elections, data gives you the power to manage voter wait times. About 10 years ago, we built a web-based data collection tool to capture, catalog and share precinct operation data on Election Day in real-time. This tool, the Automated Call Form, or ACF, gives us the power to realign our resources and improve our operations based on real knowledge.

All Election Day issues—from missing power cords to no-show pollworkers and electioneering—are entered into the ACF. Aggregated, ACF data illustrates trends in our 1,700 precincts with their 9,000 pollworkers and 10,000 units of equipment.

We use the ACF during Early Voting, but Election Day is when hundreds of users log in. They include 75 employees at a call center who field calls from pollworkers; more than one hundred operators and technicians at 19 remote locations which service our precincts; and dozens of staff and lawyers who take calls about voter entitlement, locked polling locations, etc.

On Election Day, we log thousands of calls. Most are handled over the phone quickly and ‘closed.’ Others stay ‘open’ and are flagged for physical support or other follow-up. Through the ACF’s proper use, that handoff is seamless and callers do not have to repeat their complaints.

Remote site managers use the ACF data to efficiently allocate resources and route support visits. Each manager knows where a printer has been reported offline or an ACF call hasn’t been closed. They allocate resources accordingly. Calls can be sorted by region, precinct, problem type (such as

scanner issue or electioneering) and whether they are open or closed. They can be searched by issue or keyword, which keeps issues from getting lost because of an input error.

Post-election, we can map calls by type and location to find patterns and optimize future resource distribution. Finally, we use ACF data to follow up with pollworkers and conduct micro-training⁷ on identified deficiencies. An incorrectly completed form, a complaint, an imbalance in numbers or damaged equipment might all warrant micro-training. We try to push most data into the ACF so that it may also serve as an evaluative tool for not only individual pollworkers, but for teams working together. This includes tracking positive feedback—about a pollworker who went above and beyond to assist a voter, or a precinct that operated especially efficiently.

Data-Driven Planning: Ballot Density Maps

Because turnout for most elections varies from district to district in our jurisdiction, using data to predict turnout helps allocate resources. Turnout is a function of many things, including which contests are on the ballot.

For example, in our 126 municipalities, contested races drive turnout, and contested mayoral races drive turnout the most. We note where those precincts are, and allocate resources accordingly for the expected voter surge. We call this our ballot density analysis. After the election, we note the predicted-to-actual turnout and refine our model. We have plotted these trends on maps, for a quick visual sense of where voters cluster.

Online, Election Day and Automatic Registration

As many have noted, registration errors and omissions slow lines. A modern registration process should produce better lists, speed lines, and ensure that all eligible citizens can vote, but only vote once. I support several strategies to improve registration.

The first is online registration. By July 2014, Illinois will have it, like 18 other states. This should increase registration, cut human error and reduce costs. Integrated with e-pollbooks, online registration should improve list quality, reduce lines and ease the transition to data-sharing within and between states. I also support:

- ✓ Election Day registration
- ✓ Automatic or universal registration (when a citizen reaches voting age)

These all rely on better lists, built from available data sets from DMVs and other government agencies. An efficient Election Day registration system would have a pre-populated form ready for eligible citizens on Election Day. They would then simply supply their signature.

Inter-jurisdiction transfer of information (akin to NCOA updates within a jurisdiction) would also improve list accuracy and allow better service to voters. Projects like the PEW Center's ERIC are designed for this. Benefits of better lists include:

- ✓ Fewer provisional ballots;
- ✓ Faster check-in time;
- ✓ Fewer calls to election central; and
- ✓ Fewer people disenfranchised.

Online: Mail Ballot Application

Recent legislation will allow us to take online mail ballot requests starting in 2014. In past elections, voters could download and print a mail ballot application. Next election, they will be able to skip that step and simply apply online. We will have quicker turnaround and better service for our voters. Plus, we expect fewer data entry errors and less lost mail.

Online: National Voter Information Tool

Finally, informed voters produce better elections. For more than a decade, my office has maintained a robust website, with everything from a voter guide to a ‘Voter Information Tool’ to let each voter check their registration, ballot and polling place. Last year, we unveiled a *mobile* voter tool to provide this information on the fly. These assets help each voter get to the right place at the right time, prepared to vote for the right ballot. A nationwide online Voter Information Tool that provides any voter in the U.S. with that kind of essential data would tremendously enhance the voter experience.

In fact, I have other concerns that are relevant nationwide, ranging from the importance of greater consistency in election laws from state to state (as in the example of Early Voting) to a strong national election administration agency. I believe those would make elections work better for voters, pollworkers and candidates as well.

Thank you.

Suggested links

Your Voter Information Tool

<http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/elections/voterprofile/Pages/default.aspx>

Contested Races Maps – April, 2013

http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/aboutus/map_room/Pages/ContestedRaces.aspx