



Testimony of Jeannie Layson
Director of Communications and Congressional Affairs
U.S. Election Assistance Commission
April 8, 2010

Good morning Commissioners and Executive Director Tom Wilkey. I am pleased to report that EAC staff is rapidly approaching the finalization of a draft Clearinghouse policy for consideration by the Commission. Today I will briefly share with you and the public our efforts to develop a draft policy in accordance with the Help America Vote Act and our commitment to collaborative governance and transparency.

Section 202 of the Help America Vote Act – or HAVA -- instructs the Commission to establish a national Clearinghouse and resource about federal elections. According to HAVA, the Commission shall serve as a national clearinghouse and resource for the compilation of information and review of procedures with respect to the administration of federal elections by:

(1) carrying out the duties described in part 3 (relating to the adoption of voluntary voting system guidelines), including the maintenance of a clearinghouse of information on the experiences of State and local governments in implementing the guidelines and in operating voting systems in general;

(2) carrying out the duties described in subtitle B (relating to the testing, certification, decertification, and recertification of voting system hardware and software);

(3) carrying out the duties described in subtitle C (relating to conducting studies and carrying out other activities to promote the effective administration of Federal elections);

(4) carrying out the duties described in subtitle D (relating to election assistance), and providing information and training on the management of the payments and grants provided under such subtitle;

(5) carrying out the duties described in subtitle B of title III (relating to the adoption of voluntary guidance); and

(6) developing and carrying out the Help America Vote College Program under title V.

The development of a final draft policy has been an agency-wide effort. The Communications Division has collaborated with EAC program areas to make sure the Clearinghouse will serve the customer needs of their specific stakeholders. The Research, Policy and Programs Division have been especially helpful in this regard. Program Director Karen Lynn Dyson has facilitated meetings with clearinghouse managers from other federal agencies to help us understand the policies that govern these clearinghouses and Web sites, and also how they contribute to and support agency goals.

During those meetings and through research, we learned that the scope of the policies that govern federal clearinghouses, Web site content, and information disseminated to the public, in most cases were driven by the agency's mission. For example, the National Institute of Standards and Technology's mission is to "promote U.S. innovation and industrial competitiveness by advancing measurement science, standards, and technology in ways that enhance economic security and improve our quality of life." NIST states that it "is committed to maintaining a high level of quality in the information it disseminates."

Consequently, NIST's Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility and Integrity of Disseminated Information includes information quality standards as well as a review process that may include process design and monitoring, peer monitoring during information preparation or the use of quality check lists, charts, and statistics.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission operates the National Injury Information Clearinghouse, disseminating statistics and information about the prevention of death and injury associated with consumer products. Every year the Clearinghouse receives approximately 6,000 requests for information from the public. Computerized data sources include the national electronic Injury Surveillance System, the Death Certificate File, the In-Depth Investigations File and the Injury/Potential Injury Incident File. Multi-lingual staffers operate a hotline for reporting product-related injuries.

The National Clearinghouse for Long-term Care Information, operated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, includes the following: information to help consumers decide whether to purchase long-term care insurance or to pursue other private market alternatives that pay for long-term care; information about states with long-term care insurance partnerships under the Medicaid program; and information about the availability and limitations of coverage for long-term care under the Medicaid program. The Clearinghouse offers a wide variety of resources, including interactive tools like a cost-savings calculator and ways to plan and pay for long-term care.

The mission and the customers formed the structure of these Clearinghouses and their governing policies. EAC staff has taken the same approach: we serve voters, election officials and the general public in every state and U.S. territory. Our mission is to assist the effective administration of federal elections. The challenge was how to translate the needs of our customers and EAC's mission into an online Clearinghouse.

First, we ensured we complied with all federal laws, policies and directives governing information, including but not limited to OMB Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites, the E-Government Act of 2002, OMB Circular A-130: Management of Federal Information Resources, and OMB Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies.

We then reviewed best practices recommended by federal agency working groups such as the Web Managers' Council, an interagency group of senior federal government web managers who collaborate to improve the online delivery of U.S. Government information and services. We will also incorporate the President's Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government and the embrace the concepts of Government 2.0. by providing the public with multiple interactive and responsive mediums to comment on the contents of the Clearinghouse.

In conclusion, our effort to formulate a draft Clearinghouse policy has been deliberative and thoughtful. Like elections, one size does not fit all regarding federal agencies' approaches to clearinghouses and online information portals. EAC must consider the needs of our stakeholders, our governing statute and our available resources before Commissioners adopt a final Clearinghouse policy. It is important to note that as the needs of our stakeholders change and evolve, we will have the opportunity to review and consider updating our Clearinghouse policy.

We anticipate presenting the Commission with a final draft Clearinghouse policy within the next few weeks, and I will recommend that the Commission consider putting it out for a 45-day public comment period according to EAC's Notice and Public Comment Policy.

I appreciate the support of the Commission and my EAC coworkers for helping me conduct research, find resources and understand the unique needs of our stakeholders. I believe the Clearinghouse policy will be more robust and customer-service based thanks to their contributions and their spirit of collaboration.