

**Testimony of Michael J. Gallagher, New Jersey SVRS Project Manager
US Elections Assistance Commission Hearing, April 26, 2005**

Good afternoon Chair Hillman and members of the Commission. Thank you for inviting New Jersey to participate in this important endeavour. It is our sincere pleasure to provide you with information regarding our progress in the implementation of a Statewide Voter Registration System and to provide feedback on the Proposed Voluntary Guidance on Implementation of Statewide Voter Registration Lists as drafted by the Election Assistance Commission.

Presently, I represent the State of New Jersey's Office of the Attorney General as the State's project manager for the Statewide Voter Registration System implementation.

New Jersey has traveled a long and at times, somewhat challenging road, to unite New Jersey's 21 counties and to get to the point where we are now – which is a truly collaborative effort between Election Officials representing the 21 counties and the State. Change, as is made inevitable by virtue of the implementation of a Statewide Voter Registration System, does not come without challenge – without resistance – without concern, but through an open and comprehensive communicative process with the Election Officials of New Jersey, we have overcome many of those challenges, have eased that resistance, and have assisted in quieting some of those concerns. While it is true that there will always be issues that, collectively, we do not agree on, we are all working toward the common goal of successfully implementing a Statewide Voter Registration System by January 1, 2006.

And happily, I can honestly report that the State of New Jersey will have a Statewide Voter Registration System in place by January 1, 2006.

First, let me speak to where we are....

The State of New Jersey has recently contracted with Covansys, an SVRS solution provider, to implement an SVRS for New Jersey. We have chosen ElectionNet for our system and we are currently in the process of completing the joint application development process so that a final specification document can be drafted and used as the basis for assuring that the application will meet 100% of the State of New Jersey's requirements. There are multiple phases in successfully implementing a system of this magnitude, many of which are typically planned out over a 24 to 30 month period – but because of our time constraints, we have put many of these phases on parallel tracks. With the cooperation of our Election Officials, we are confident that we can achieve our common goals and have a fully functional system in place by January 1, 2006.

So, that's where we are – now let me speak to how we have gotten here...

New Jersey started its effort by appointing a diverse group of individuals to act as a committee to assist in the development of the State Plan to qualify for federal funding under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). On August 15, 2003, New Jersey filed its State Plan with the Federal Election Commission. Almost immediately, the Office of the Attorney General/Division of Elections started working on implementing the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS).

To assist the State with drafting a request for proposal to procure application and implementation services, the State chose to hire Virchow Krause as our Consulting Company. This decision proved to be a winning one as Virchow Krause, who was well experienced in writing such documents and who had already worked with three other states in developing their application and implementation requirements, immediately hit the ground running. They far exceeded our expectations, both in helping the State bridge many of the gaps that existed between the State and the 21 Counties and in preparing a comprehensive document that would ensure that all of New Jersey's requirements would be met.

Now, for those of you unfamiliar with New Jersey – I can tell you that Election Officials in New Jersey are among the most passionate and perhaps the most dedicated group of professionals I have ever come across in nearly 17 years of government work. And it has been a result of that very passion and professionalism that has propelled us beyond our differences and has united us in a common goal.

The State understood early on that it would not be easy to elicit the support of all 21 Counties for a Statewide System because for so long, this effort has been the sole responsibility of the local offices. And gaining this support has been and continues to prove challenging.

But as is true of any relationship, having a basis of trust as the foundation is the key to success, and the State has recognized and embraced this concept by working diligently to establish this trust. This was accomplished by making the process an “open process” and sharing all information, no matter how minor - with the County Election Officials. We embraced them as partners and found compromise on issues that were important to them. Moreover, we listened to them and took their concerns seriously and made it a point to never let any concern go un-addressed. The SVRS and its impending implementation became a discussion point at every election related function we hosted or attended. We established committees to work on various phases of the project and we ensured that County Election Officials across the board – Superintendents of Election, Boards of Election, County Clerks, and Municipal Clerks - were well represented on those committees.

To jump-start this massive undertaking, The Attorney General's Office/Division of Elections in conjunction with Virchow Krause developed a data collection template that assisted with the collection of county data. We visited each county and held Focus Groups. We valued their input and through this process, developed a comprehensive RFP.

As mentioned earlier, and in full accordance with state procurement guidelines, the State chose Covansys as the vendor to create our Centralized Voter Registration System.

Covansys joined the State with an existing application known as ElectioNet which is already implemented in Connecticut, West Virginia and Rhode Island and which is currently in the process of being implemented in Maine, New Hampshire, Idaho and Nevada. The existing application came to New Jersey already meeting approximately 85% of our requirements - one of the valuable benefits of selecting an existing product that has gone through the development process in several states.

The ElectionNet system provides the ability to process election management, pre-election preparation, petition management, absentee ballots, and ongoing administration with minimal custom configurations. ElectionNet also provides a majority of the reporting capabilities through pre-designed reports and the ability to generate custom ad hoc reports.

The ElectionNet system is designed to ensure that each registered voter will be uniquely identified and tracked within the SVRS, enabling the Office of the Attorney General/Division of Elections to ensure that duplicate records are removed. The system will also enable the County Election Officials to remove from the list only those voters who are not eligible to vote.

One of the major hurdles we have had to overcome has been the Election Officials' confidence in the central server, particularly in the face of any potential malfunction or breakdown. Addressing concerns surrounding their ability to continue to retain the same level of functionality and provide the level of service they are accustomed to providing was imperative to gaining County support for the SVRS initiative. The State addressed this concern by creating an architecture where each of the 21 counties would have its own server to work from in the event of a catastrophic failure. These servers capture data at the local level and pass it to the State on a conceptually real-time basis. This appears to be in conformity with information provided in Section III - Guidance on Statewide Voter Registration Lists, in the recently drafted document we are here to discuss today.

The State of New Jersey faces a unique challenge in that it supports 21 counties each with responsibility for registering and maintaining its voter lists within its jurisdiction. In addition, 566 municipalities will have read-only access to data appropriate to their responsibilities. The challenge is to maintain uniformity in approach, data collected and maintained, registration processes, and the accuracy of the registration data. The proposed solution will be centrally located and locally administered. This approach will ensure that each municipality will have uniform access through the internet to the central server where the SVRS will reside. While this approach satisfies specific requirements within the HAVA legislation, there are other advantages: 1) a centralized system that provides counties with internet access will ensure that changes to SVRS need be performed only once, and 2) the updated information will be available immediately to all of the municipalities, therefore reducing the risks of non-uniformity. This approach also ensures that Counties will continue to have the ability to add and delete registered voters within their respective jurisdictions.

New Jersey's solution is fully internet-based and will enable immediate and real-time electronic access to the SVRS by authorized State and local Election Officials. ElectionNet is built on a robust security infrastructure that will provide role and user-based access and will provide secure and encrypted data communications within the application and between the municipalities, the central location, and the external agencies. Additionally, security is built into the database layer that provides table and record level security for the voter data, thus ensuring that citizen data is protected. The real-time, internet-based access to the SVRS will ensure the ability to provide verification and query capability with municipalities and other State agency data.

ElectioNet is designed to be intuitive to navigate and easy to use with the objective of increasing the effectiveness of election officials using the system and to augment the voter registration process. The user interface is built around the context of accepted industry standards for user interaction with web-based applications. Functions and data are presented as pull-down menu items, pick lists, and radio buttons, while the user interface is organized to mirror the process of voter registration, incorporating workflow-driven rules. In order to facilitate the user's ability to efficiently navigate and work with the SVRS, context-sensitive help is provided to guide the user.

As mentioned previously, we are performing concurrent work and putting multiple tasks on simultaneous tracks. We are now in the process of completing the Joint Application Development (JAD) sessions from which the remaining 15% of New Jersey Requirements are identified and fleshed out to ensure their inclusion in the final product. For this endeavor - and certainly for all future endeavours - we welcomed the participation of Election Official representatives from all 21 Counties. However, to ensure the sessions were productive, we requested that ten individuals serve as a "Core Group" and bring forth comments and concerns from the other counties. In the spirit of cooperation, the County Officials agreed and the JAD sessions went remarkably well and were extremely productive. These sessions were broken down by ElectioNet Module and took place during an aggressive six week period where we met, in some cases, as many as four times in a given week. This was a tremendous effort on the part of the Election Officials as they, too, had full-time responsibilities back at their respective offices.

Other phases of the project that are simultaneously under way are the data conversion phases and site survey phases to ensure that communication lines and previously specified hardware requirements are adequate. Adjustments are made as necessary during these confirmation and further discovery processes. Preliminary planning of the User Acceptance Testing and Training phases are also well under way.

The State of New Jersey's implementation plan includes the roll-out of the SVRS to "Pilot Counties." These counties, whose collective data represents approximately one third of the voter registration data in the State, play a critical roll in helping us in successfully completing this implementation, as through our experience in implementing within these six counties, we will improve upon our implementation execution and ensure a smoother transition for the remaining 15 Counties. It is anticipated that these six "Pilot Counties" will be fully operational and using the Statewide system in November, 2005.

With regard to the Proposed Voluntary Guidance on Implementation of Statewide Voter Registration Lists as drafted by the Elections Assistance Commission, New Jersey applauds this effort and concurs with the content developed thus far as it directly reflects many of the practices the State of New Jersey already employs in administering the implementation of New Jersey's Statewide Voter Registration System.

Again, I would like to thank all of you for providing New Jersey the opportunity to share its successes with you – I do hope that you have found our report helpful.