

Planning an Escape From Electronic Voting Machines

By Ann E. Marimow and Matthew Mosk
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As the General Assembly debates the reliability of Maryland's voting systems, a Montgomery County legislator has taken steps to ditch the state's electronic machines for the coming election and switch to paper ballots.

Del. *Sheila E. Hixson*, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, wants the state to use optical scan machines. She has proposed legislative amendments to ensure that the systems can be leased in time for the September primary.

"The controversy here is about people's faith in having their vote recorded," Hixson said yesterday. "We want to make sure there's an accurate count in this election."

Maryland has committed to paying \$90 million to bring in electronic voting machines manufactured by Diebold Elections Systems for use statewide. The state's elections chief, *Linda H. Lamone*, defended the setup as one of the most reliable in the nation in a meeting yesterday with The Washington Post's editorial board. Lamone also cast doubt on whether optical scan machines would be available for the fall elections.

But *Robb McGinnis*, regional sales manager for Election Systems and Software, said yesterday that the Nebraska-based company can deliver if it is given enough notice.

"We're telling everyone, if you give us the go-ahead shortly, we'll provide the equipment," McGinnis said. "It's all timing."

Hixson estimated it would cost Maryland \$16 million to lease the machines for this year's elections.

Last week, Gov. *Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.* (R) said he had lost confidence in the State Board of Elections' "ability to conduct fair and accurate elections," in part because of questions about the security of the Diebold machines and a new law that will allow voters to cast ballots in the week before the election.

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