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Change to Voting Process for the 2016 Presidential Primary Election

Early voting process will mirror election day process as most voters will vote a paper ballot by hand

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Annapolis, Maryland (February 4, 2016): The Maryland State Board of Elections announced today a change to how the new voting system equipment will be used during early voting for the 2016 Presidential Primary Election. For this election, most early voters will manually make their selections on paper ballots and feed the marked ballots into a digital scanner. Voters with disabilities may use an accessible ballot marking device at each early voting center to make selections independently. With this change, the voting process during early voting will be identical to the election day process.

“Because of the number of candidates on this election’s ballot, I was concerned that voters may not be able to easily find their candidates of choice,” stated Linda H. Lamone, State Administrator. “When we heard from voters having troubles making selections and navigating in contests with many candidates, we thought that hand marking paper ballots was the best option for most voters and candidates.”

“With the State Board’s action today, I am confident that the voting experience in the 2016 Primary Election will be simple and easier to navigate,” stated David J. McManus, Jr., Chairman of the State Board of Elections. “We look forward to using the ballot marking device in future elections but believe today’s decision is the right outcome for Maryland voters and candidates.”

As initially designed, all voters during early voting would have used an accessible ballot marking device to make selections. The voter would then feed into a digital scanner the ballot printed from the ballot marking device. This equipment configuration was designed to allow for the smoothest possible transition for voters and election officials as the State moves to a new paper-based voting system.

The ballot for Maryland’s 2016 Presidential Primary Election, however, has an exceptionally large number of contests with multiple candidates. The large number of candidates means that candidates’ names in at least ten contests will be displayed on more than one screen on the ballot marking device. For example, there are currently eleven Republican nominees for President of the United States and nine Democratic nominees for Congressional District 8. After reviewing the final list of candidates and the number of contests with multiple screens, the State Board of Elections decided to use hand-marked paper ballots as the primary means voting at this time.

Although most voters will not use ballot marking devices in the 2016 Presidential Primary Election, the State Board of Elections is confident in the ballot marking device technology and will be expanding its use in future elections.

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