

March 1, 2019

Freedomworks
c/o Jason Pye
400 North Capitol St. NW Ste. 765
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Pye:

Your organization has consistently advocated for common-sense government reform, and your efforts to promote cost-effective locally-sourced solutions have benefitted families and communities across the nation. But based on your recent letter attacking touchscreen-marked paper ballots, our office was dismayed to learn that your support for smart government stops, apparently, at the ballot box.

Your position against touchscreen-marked paper ballots demonstrates either a fundamental misunderstanding of the debate at hand or a blind acceptance of the partisan rhetoric of interest groups that are the antithesis of everything you claim to stand for. But given that Freedomworks is a far-removed DC organization, it may be safest to assume that you do not fully comprehend the climate of our state, the demands of our communities, or the objectives of this office.

As our state explores options for our next election machines, it is clear that we must select a system which best protects election integrity - guaranteeing both safe elections and accurate vote counts. The touchscreen-marked paper ballot system outlined in HB 316 is the only system that brings Georgia's voters safe and accurate elections while also offering ease of use and the option to conduct post-election audits.

Georgia's election officials – those with the enormous responsibility of overseeing and administering every election in our state - understand better than anyone the day-to-day challenges of protecting, preserving, and promoting election integrity. These officials are overwhelmingly supportive of a touchscreen-marked paper ballot.

Ninety-four percent of Georgia's County Election Supervisors agree that touchscreen-marked paper ballots with a paper trail strike a common-sense balance between security, accessibility, and transparency. The Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, which is the official advocate for all 159 county governments in the state, has also expressed strong support for the legislation – along with seventy-nine percent of likely Georgia voters.

The bi-partisan SAFE Commission overwhelmingly recommended touchscreen-marked paper ballots as the system that most appropriately fits the needs of our communities while offering superior advantages in security, accessibility, and transparency. The recent internal analysis by Director of Elections Chris Harvey simply suggests that touchscreen-

marked paper ballots are also a cost-effective solution for county governments and local taxpayers.

Based on an audit of information from local election officials and previously conducted Requests for Information, our office can say with confidence that a hand-marked paper ballot system would cost Georgia up to \$224 million over ten years – the brunt of which would fall on our counties to pay for in the form of ballot printing costs. This wholesale examination – the only of its kind – makes it clear that the lowball estimates of \$35 million for hand-marked paper ballot costs peddled by interest groups are largely misleading.

Based on this analysis, it is also clear that the choice for Georgia’s lawmakers is between a voting system funded primarily on the backs of our local taxpayers or through state allocations. Those who support touchscreen-marked paper ballots largely do so in the interest of protecting our local governments from unfunded mandates and unpopular top-down directives from the state government.

That Freedomworks chooses to stand in opposition to the will of Georgia’s voters, elections officials, and local governments might be justifiable. But that your organization chooses to stand in opposition to lower taxes and local solutions is deeply unsettling. It is even more disturbing that your organization seems to have solidified its opposition based on largely unfounded claims by partisan groups and unsuccessful candidates.

HB 316 is a bipartisan, voter-centric piece of legislation which will guarantee ballot access for every eligible voter while protecting election integrity, prioritizing transparency, and keeping more hard-earned money in our taxpayers’ pockets. Its passage will represent a victory for the common-sense solutions which are supported overwhelmingly by Georgia’s election officials and voters.

Although the moral outrage hawked by interest groups can be compelling, it is more useful for the purposes of good governance to promote an honest, fact-based dialogue. Our office will continue to promote a truthful discourse that seeks real, voter-centered solutions while prioritizing the greatest savings for Georgia’s taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Jordan Fuchs
Deputy Secretary of State
The State of Georgia