STATE OF MAINE

OFFICE

OF THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

SHENNA BELLOWS
SECRETARY OF STATE

January 15, 2021

Honorable Louis J. Luchini
Senate Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0100

Honorable Christopher Caiazzo
House Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0100

Dear Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and Members of the Committee:

Maine election law, Title 21-A section 195, requires the Secretary of State to report annually "on the administration of the central voter registration system" (i.e. CVR). The law permits that the report may "address issues of public access to the information from the central voter registration system, taking into consideration the compelling state interests to prevent voter fraud and the potential disenfranchisement of voters and to ensure voters are not discouraged from participating in the voting process". The following is the required 2020 report.

Appendix A of this report provides the background and history of implementation of the CVR, as well as current voter registration figures and a summary of CVR management and maintenance activities and statistics for 2020. This data provides valuable insight into a major tool of election administration -- indeed, the backbone -- of Maine's voter registration, absentee voting and election results tracking and reporting system.

The CVR is a statewide system for maintaining voter registration and election information by State and local election officials, which was implemented in compliance with the Help America Vote Act of 2002 and state law. Maine's customized CVR was implemented in May of 2007 with a highly secure uniform registration software application and database that allows for local control of data input, while providing central oversight and management of data accuracy. It is worthwhile to take note that the application and database have had an extremely low incidence of system downtime.

Data in the CVR is never static. The database is being accessed and updated on a daily basis by state and local election administrators in response to information received from voters and reliable data maintenance sources such as death records and notices of cancellation from election administrators in other jurisdictions.

However, as with any tool, the CVR must be maintained and used by humans. Accordingly, the effectiveness of the CVR is dependent upon the diligence of users to accurately enter, maintain and report on the voter registration data it contains, as well as the voters themselves to provide complete and accurate information on the voter registration application or change forms. Accordingly, deficiencies in the voter registration data are attributable to human clerical omissions and errors.

To help improve and maintain data integrity, the Elections Division personnel monitor CVR data; plan and execute periodic, system-wide, non-discriminatory data maintenance activities as required by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA); and provide guidance and training to a constantly changing set of local election officials in 500 municipalities. In accordance with the requirements of the NVRA, we plan to conduct a statewide maintenance mailing in the Spring/Summer of 2021 to voters who have had no activity since the 2007 implementation as well as to voters who have had no activity since November 1, 2016, to identify voters who potentially have moved from their Maine voting residence. Based on responses to this mailing (which by federal law must include a postage-prepaid reply card), voters will either remain in Active Status, or be changed to Inactive or Cancelled Status.

Although municipal and state users access CVR via the internet, no users have direct access to the application or database servers. All user access is strictly controlled via complex passwords and defined user roles and permissions. Users connect to the web server, which is accessible via a web link. The web server connects to the application server, which is located in the Secretary of State's Data Center, and is protected by the State's firewall system. Only the application server can access the database via a private network with the database server. The database server also is located in the Secretary of State's Data Center.

Technology modernization is a vital consideration when it comes to protecting the integrity and security of voter registration information. Almost fourteen years after the CVR's implementation, the Department recognizes the need to upgrade or modernize the system. We have a decision to make about whether to move forward with ongoing maintenance and upgrades of the existing CVR or invest in a new system. Cybersecurity is a critical consideration in a fast-changing threat environment. Additionally, it is important to consider performance and usability, especially given new requirements and potential reforms that were not envisioned over a decade ago when the original system was created. For example, implementing the recently passed automatic voter registration law in a timely way will require technological changes for the efficient transfer of information to the CVR. The Secretary of State and our top elections and information security officials will be seeking input from stakeholders and examining these questions in the coming months. Such an undertaking will be significant, but necessary, to optimize the CVR and to facilitate implementation of new laws that may be enacted at the federal and state levels.

I look forward to working with you as you consider this report, and as our Department continues to uphold the integrity and security of Maine elections through faithful and diligent maintenance of a secure CVR system. Please feel free to contact me at 626-8400 if I can provide you with any additional materials, answer any questions, or assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

Description of the Central Voter Registration (CVR) System

The CVR is a statewide system for maintaining voter registration and election information by State and local election officials, which was implemented in compliance with the Help America Vote Act of 2002 and state law. The CVR consists of a highly-modified, proprietary software application (called *ElectioNet)*, developed and supported by a vendor, CIVIX (formerly PCC Technology, Inc.); and an Oracle database that is maintained by the Department of the Secretary of State in the Department's secure data center.

The application is accessed by municipal clerks and registrars, as well as State elections staff, over the internet. Updates and changes are made in real time and are immediately visible to authorized staff, as well as available for reports pursuant to the law. However, CVR is not available to municipal election officials on Election Day except for inquiries, updating absentee information, and printing reports. New voter records or changes to existing voter records must not be done on Election Day. They must be done within 15 business days following the election. This decision was made to ensure that a data entry error would not incorrectly remove a voter's record from the municipality of registration on Election Day.

Clerks and registrars in over 500 municipalities are primarily responsible for individual voter record maintenance, including: adding new voter records, updating records with address changes, party changes, or other changes; and entering voter participation history (i.e. the voters who voted at an election). The CVR is the electronic software application and database that enables these municipal clerks and registrars to maintain voter registration records and to administer key election management activities, such as issuing and tracking absentee ballots and printing the incoming voting lists for Election Day.

State election officials conduct system-wide data maintenance efforts and batch updates as allowed by law. Consequently, the success and accuracy of the CVR relies not only on the Department's performance of its system maintenance duties, but also on the accurate and timely use of the system by municipal clerks and registrars.

History of CVR Implementation

By the spring of 2007, the Department of the Secretary of State had fully implemented the CVR, meeting the requirements of the state and federal law. The Department successfully deployed all required CVR infrastructure, including municipal equipment and network connectivity; the CVR application, *ElectioNet*, became fully operational; voter registration data from all municipal jurisdictions was loaded into the statewide database; and election officials from all municipalities received initial training on how to use the new system.

Benefits of the CVR

The Department and municipal election officials are able to realize the benefits of an integrated software application and database for maintaining voter registration data. Municipal election officials have a functional voter registration system that requires no local licensing or maintenance fees, and that facilitates voter registration and election activities.

The CVR allows clerks and registrars to share information through the use of electronic notices, so that when a voter registers in a new municipality, the voter's old record may be updated by the election official in the new municipality, and automatically removed from the municipality of prior registration, saving the election officials both time and mailing costs.

The CVR also allows the Department to more efficiently complete activities that were once left to municipalities to perform. These activities include biennial mandatory federal reporting of voter registration statistics and Election Day voting information; and the conduct of voter list maintenance functions required by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA). The Department routinely works with municipalities to identify and remove records of deceased voters, voters who have moved, and duplicate voter records.

Voter Registration Statistics and Activities

As of January 1, 2021, Maine has 1,134,245 active status voters and 3,595 inactive status voters. Statewide, active status registered voters comprise 103% of Maine's Voting Age Population (VAP) of 1,095,370. (The Voting Age Population figure is derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's July 1, 2019 population estimates. The estimated VAP for July 1, 2020 is likely to be higher than the 2019 figure, which will lower the percentage of active status voters to the estimated VAP.)

We typically have many new voter registrations in the general election years, followed by list maintenance activities in subsequent years, which identify and remove the names of voters who have moved or died. In 2020, we held a first-in-20-years' presidential primary, a state primary and a presidential general election, all of which increased the number of voters, and the efforts to remove ineligible voters will occur this spring of 2021.

In the coming weeks, as other states and local jurisdictions notify Maine of the voters who moved and voted in the new jurisdiction, the Maine records will be designated as cancelled, and the active status numbers will decrease to less than 100% of the VAP. This is the normal cycle of voter registration before and after a Presidential General Election.

Additionally, census data is at the county level, while voter registration is at the municipal level. Thus, the census data does not match up exactly due to not accurately accounting for voters from unorganized territories, townships, and the more than 6,000 uniformed service and overseas voters who are registered in the last place they lived before leaving the US but are not counted in the Census.

In 2020, municipal election officials (clerks and registrars) across the State processed 88,236 new voter registrations and 168,312 registration changes (which includes 80,758 moves to new municipalities and 87,554 changes of party or other changes).

The CVR was also used to process over 532,000 absentee ballot requests for the November 3, 2020 General Election, including 6,500 ballot requests processed by the Elections Division for the Uniformed Service and Overseas Voters (UOCAVA). UOCAVA voters were able to request ballots using mail, fax, email and the online Absentee Ballot Request (ABR) service; and to return their ballots via mail, fax, or as a scanned image attached to an email.

2020 Data Maintenance Statistics

In 2020, State or municipal election officials performed individual and statewide, periodic voter list maintenance activities that resulted in records of voters being removed from the database (i.e. cancelled) for the following reasons:

o   11,643 - voters deceased
o   3,028 – duplicate records
o   0 – voters inactive for 2 federal general elections (done in odd-numbered years only)
o   9,488 – voters moved from the municipality of registration
o   120 – registrar hearing determined voters ineligible
o   374 – voter requested removal from list
   24,653 – Total records cancelled due to required voter list maintenance activities

Summary of Data Maintenance Statistics from June 2007 to the Present

The following is a summary of the data maintenance statistics from June 2007 to the end of 2020, reflecting the total number of voter records cancelled from the database to date:

- o 142,971 – voters deceased
- o   42,650 – duplicate records
- o 111,227 – voters inactive for 2 federal general elections
- o 257,921 – voters moved from the municipality of registration
- o   1,263 – registrar hearing determined voters ineligible
- o   5,903 – voter requested removal from list
  561,935 – Total records cancelled due to required voter list maintenance activities

Ongoing Obligations, Improvements and Enhancements

Help Desk

In addition to its election-specific CVR activity, the Department has ongoing responsibilities to maintain the system and provide support to its municipal partners. The Department maintains and staffs a toll-free Help Desk line to provide assistance to municipal clerks and registrars and offers annual refresher training.

In 2020, CVR staff logged 2,030 non-security related calls to the Help Desk. Of these 2,030 Help Desk calls, 1,265 calls (62%) related to voter registration, enrollment and absentee voting. Another 404 calls (20%) related to CVR data requests and Voter Participation History; 281 calls (14%) related to scanning and reporting functions and maintaining municipal data (maintaining Street Libraries and Elections and managing CVR user accounts); and 80 calls (4%) related to internet browser, system requirements, and other technical issues. Additionally, CVR staff handled 686 calls related to CVR security, most related to password assistance.

Site Computing Equipment

Prior to implementation of the CVR, the Department conducted an extensive review/needs assessment of local computing equipment and capabilities, and found that nearly half of the jurisdictions had either no equipment or equipment with insufficient memory or processing speed to use the CVR application. Additionally, in order to ensure that all municipalities had the same equipment, and to facilitate the State's support of local CVR users, the State used HAVA grant monies to purchase a desktop computer, printer and peripherals to allow every municipality to perform CVR functions in a consistent manner. This equipment is now obsolete and has been retired. Municipalities now use a municipal computer to access CVR, and the State is not intending to supply site computing equipment in the future.