

## Voter-Verified Paper Ballots – Tabulated or Hand-Counted – Support Democracy Unverifiable “Electronic Ballots” Undermine Democracy

The foundation of democracy is each citizen’s right to vote for the candidates of their choice and have those votes counted. All voters must have access to a private ballot; they must be able to confirm that their choices are correctly reflected on the ballot – and that this ballot is actually counted.

**Voter verification of the ballot is possible only when paper ballots are used.** Voter-verified paper ballots can be counted by an automatic tabulator or by hand. When the tabulator is an optical scanner, ballots are fed into the machine just as paper is fed into a fax machine. The scanner reads the voters’ selections and tallies the votes. Used at the polling place, automatic tabulators, such as optical scanners, can provide immediate notification in the case of overvotes, allowing a voter to correct and recast their vote on the spot. Furthermore, the technology currently exists to provide such feedback in multiple languages.

Direct Record Electronic (DREs, commonly called “touch-screen”) incorporate the benefits of advanced technology. DREs can provide voting access to people with visual and physical disabilities and those with limited English proficiency. With improvements in DRE technology, this benefit has the potential to further enfranchise large portions of the voting population who would otherwise be unable to vote privately and independently.

Security concerns about DREs have nothing to do with the accessibility they offer to people who need special assistance. Security concerns relate to the inherently unverifiable “electronic ballot” that DREs create when the voter finalizes the voting. This unverifiable “electronic ballot” is nothing more than invisible, electrical charges inside the computer.

**No voter can verify electrical charges, so there is no way for voters to confirm that their votes were cast as they intended.** Instead, the unverifiable electrical charges inside the computer – which may not match the screen or “voter-verifiable paper trail” (VVPAT) – are counted for the all-important initial tally. In fact, there have been numerous documented instances where the invisible, electronic tally did not match the VVPAT tally.

Furthermore, because of the nature of computer data, “electronic ballots” can **never** be properly or transparently safeguarded like physical ballots can. Only when physical ballots are used can election officials safeguard the ballot through chain of custody procedures.

**How can we continue to use DREs for accessibility without forfeiting the ballot security essential to ensuring confidence in a basic democratic process?**

The answer is this. Where DREs are used to ensure accessibility or for other reasons, they must produce an individual, accessible “voter-verifiable paper ballot” which must be counted for all tallies, audits, and recounts. “Electronic ballots” cannot be used for any purpose, since voters cannot verify their accuracy.

When DREs are thus used as computerized paper-ballot-marking devices, they continue to provide the same accessibility for people who need special assistance, but they do not undermine democracy or disenfranchise voters as they do when they create inherently unverifiable “electronic ballots” that are then counted as if they were valid ballots.

Wherever paper ballots are automatically tabulated, the tabulators can miscount votes. So, rigorous manual audits of the machines’ accuracy are crucial. Miscounts of paper ballots can be simply resolved by hand counting all the original ballots. When DREs create unverifiable “electronic ballots,” those ballots cannot be meaningfully recounted, and the reason for miscounts or massive undercounts may never be discovered or corrected.