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Election Integrity Groups Unite Against SB403 House Version

ATLANTA GA – Local and national election integrity (EI) groups united Tuesday against a new House version of the SB403 voting system bill. Leaders from Verified Voting, VoterGA and Common Cause testified about problems with revisions to the bill they supported when it passed the Senate. Those groups and the National Election Defense Coalition have now joined other EI groups such as Georgians for Verified Voting, the Coalition for Good Government and the Georgia Sunshine Project to oppose the new version.

None of four small language changes proposed by supporting EI groups were in a substitute version that passed a House Sub Committee Tuesday after a motion by Secretary of State (SOS) candidate “Buzz” Brockway. The EI groups point to an example of two simple changes needed to close legal loopholes and protect Georgia voters against “new wave” unverifiable voting. That technology **tabulates votes hidden in bar codes** instead of tabulating human readable marks. House leaders have indicated they oppose those voter protections because they do not want to restrict the incumbent vendor’s bid even if they have no modern, verifiable voting system to offer Georgians. The EI groups contend that the House allegiance should be to its taxpaying Georgia voting constituents and not out of state vendors.

Also at issue is the implementation timeline. The Senate version charged the next (SOS) with initiating a bid process in January after taking office. That would be based on data gathered by current SOS Brian Kemp. The original House version entrusts Kemp with initiating the Request for Proposal by August 1 and making a selection before leaving office. **The bill has no provision for an independent committee to perform the evaluation and selection.** Witnesses testified that the process was unfair to the new SOS and not independent. Kemp is on record as supporting the recent Rockdale County voting system pilot that used equipment supplied by incumbent vendor ES&S to tabulate unverifiable votes in bar codes.

In 2001, Georgia had a law requiring every voting machine type that was evaluated to have an independent audit trail of each vote cast [SB213 - O.C.G.A. 21-2-301(b)]. In 2002, legislators removed the law to pave the way for the purchase of a \$54 million voting system that had no independent audit trails. [SB414] After an evaluation, then SOS Cathy Cox awarded the bid to the vendor whose lobbyist, Lewis Massey, was a former SOS and her former boss. Critics claim that the SB403 House version sets the stage to repeat history.