HB316 Will Attempt to Legalize Unverifiable Voting Again

ATLANTA GA – Georgia’s House will vote on a new omnibus election bill today that authorizes the state to purchase electronic ballot marking devices including those producing ballots with votes that are impossible for Georgia voters to verify. The bill, HB316, was introduced by Rep. Barry Fleming and is co-sponsored by members of the leadership team for House Speaker David Ralston.

HB316 allows electronic ballot marking systems to tabulate hidden votes embedded in computer generated bar codes the voter cannot read and verify. This “new wave” of unverifiable voting never tabulates the human readable vote marks made by voters for an election.

HB316 also defines a new vendor term called “scanning ballot” that authorizes bar coded selections printed on small pieces of paper, not full face standard ballots. The paper does not allow voters to see unselected candidates or the language of amendments that were on the real ballot.

HB316 requires the state to replace all of Georgia’s current electronic voting machines with electronic ballot marking devices that cannot be meaningfully audited according to a Georgia Tech study, correspondence from 24 computer scientists, a report from the cybersecurity expert of Georgia’s SAFE voting system commission and a letter from the inventor of risk limiting audits.

Preliminary VoterGA estimates show a statewide implementation will cost Georgia taxpayers an extra $100 million initially and roughly $10 million more annually in testing, maintenance, licensing fees and logistics compared to less expensive, more auditable alternatives. No justifiable benefits have been identified to offset the significant additional expenditures. Electronic ballot marking devices produce paper selections that are subject to the same process flow and fraud prevention controls as hand marked ballots. Modern scanners included with any new system can detect “overvotes” in the same manner as electronic ballot marking devices.

In 2002, the Georgia legislature removed a law that required voting systems to “…have an independent audit trail for each vote cast”. That paved the way to purchase a new $54 million “unverifiable” voting system still used today and often criticized as disenfranchising Georgians for 16 years. [O.C.G.A. 21-2-301(b) SB213, Act 166, 2001]