

June 20, 2019

The Honorable Corey Stapleton
Montana Capitol Building, Rm 260
P.O. Box 202801
Helena, MT 59620-2801

RE: Implementation of New BPro Election System

Dear Secretary Stapleton,

The Montana Clerk and Recorder's Association (Association) stands with the Secretary of State in his desire to have Montana lead the nation in election processes; however, the Association has grave concerns with the proposed timeline from the Secretary of State's Office regarding the replacement of the Montana Votes system. While we stand ready to work on the conversion and implementation as desired by the Secretary of State, for the benefit of the voters of Montana, the Association strongly suggests that the full implementation be delayed until such time as the system has been properly implemented, tested, and county election staff trained ensuring the integrity and security of our elections. A more conservative timeline and our suggested implementation goal would be 2021, after the primary and general elections of 2020.

We appreciate the inclusion of county election professionals to work through the details of such a conversion, and we have liked much of what we have seen in terms of functionality; however, the slated launch in January 2020 is very worrisome. We participated in the implementation of the current Montana Votes system, and it was an enormous and lengthy process (approximately three years—from RFP in 2004 until roll out during the 2007 municipal elections with a great deal of tweaking until the 2008 presidential election). Given our experience and the progress-to-date of the new system as well as the stated timeline for full implementation, we are not confident that the conversion along with adequate testing and training can occur in time for the 2020 election cycle.

While we are eager to continue supporting the conversion, we urge the development of a more attainable timeline, taking into consideration the limited staff and resources available at the local government level. The County Leads have dedicated tremendous amounts of time and energy to assist the Secretary of State's Office in understanding the intricacies of the election process in Montana. Unlike the Secretary of State, Election Administrators do not have additional resources to dedicate to this conversion in terms of grant dollars or personnel. All work on behalf of the Secretary of State's conversion comes from existing staff with existing duties to fulfill in county election offices in advance of the next election.

To ensure a quality finished product and a safe and secure election process for the voters of Montana, we ask that you re-evaluate the implementation timeline and develop realistic benchmarks to determine "go" or "no-go" **after** the 2020 election cycle. We need the ability to test a new system that is fully functional and to train election staff across the 56 counties in advance of having them train election judges across Montana. **ALL of this** must occur prior to the election itself and actually begins with the petition processes in January, well before the Montana Primary. It would seem more reasonable to begin this immense change-over outside of a presidential cycle, which could be one of the biggest in our lifetimes. In conclusion, we believe the current project development timeline is simply too aggressive and stands to put the election process in Montana at risk.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Verhasselt, President
Montana Clerk and Recorders and Election Administrators Association
Richland County Clerk & Recorder

CC: Christi Jacobsen, Dana Corson, Stuart Fuller, and Suzanne Davis