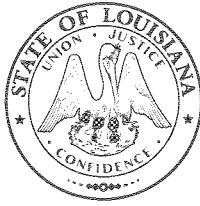


SHARON W. HEWITT
State Senator
District 1
P.O. Box 828
Slidell, LA 70459



**SENATE
STATE OF LOUISIANA**

COMMITTEES
Senate and Governmental
Affairs, Chairwoman
Environmental Quality
Natural Resources
Select Committee on Coastal
Restoration and Flood Protection
Select Committee on Women
and Children
Senate Executive Committee
Joint Legislative Committee
on the Budget

February 24, 2021

Via email (kyle.ardoin@sos.la.gov)
Louisiana Secretary of State
ATTN: The Honorable Kyle Ardoin
Secretary of State
P.O. Box 94125
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Dear Secretary Ardoin:

**SUBJECT: REQUEST TO CANCEL THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
FOR NEW LOUISIANA VOTING SYSTEM**

As Chairwoman of the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee, with responsibility for oversight of elections, I am requesting that you cancel the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the acquisition of a new voting system in Louisiana that was initiated on January 27, 2021.

Never in our nation's history has there been so much attention focused on ballot security and what constitutes a fair election process. Essential to our democracy is that voters have trust in the election and ballot-counting processes.

As THE Statewide elected official charged with protecting our election procedures, your office's actions are paramount to building trust and instilling confidence that our elections are fair and run according to Louisiana laws enacted by the legislature.

In this current RFP process, you solely determined Louisiana's standards for election machines, greatly expanding the state's statutes, and sidestepping input from the public, election experts, the vendors, and the legislature, before the issuance of the RFP.

By rushing this RFP before any legislative oversight hearings, which I scheduled and then canceled at your request, you have undermined the public's ability to provide input and ask questions.

Now you are attempting to further avoid public scrutiny by hiding behind a blackout period from the initiation of the RFP until the contract is awarded.

Over the past several months, many reports have received national attention and questioned not just the fairness of our processes around the country, but just as importantly, the vendors, machines, and technology used to count votes and protect the integrity of our elections.

We must take additional time to thoroughly examine all the facts and use this as an opportunity to reinforce public trust in our election processes with a focus on unprecedented transparency.

I believe the RFP process could be greatly improved by using outside experts to certify that all proposed election systems meet the Louisiana standards and provide secure elections. Even though the use of outside experts is clearly allowed in state law per R.S. 18:1361(B), I'm frustrated and disappointed that a less transparent process of in-house certifications has been chosen.

I am also profoundly concerned that history is repeating itself. As you know, several years ago, your office awarded a new state contract worth nearly \$100 million for new election machines. The state's Chief Procurement Officer ultimately overturned that award for irregularities in the bidding process.

This year a vendor has already filed a protest, only weeks after the initiation of the current RFP, with accusations that the state standards written by your office advantage certain vendors and eliminate reasonable options that would provide for more competition.

How can this be in the best interest of the taxpayers?

I am also concerned about spending \$100 million in taxpayer money on new voting machines at a time when voting procedures and systems are in the midst of a nationwide debate.

It's clear that a "super-cycle" of new procedures, elections laws, and voting machine technology advancement is just around the corner. Rushing to commit ourselves now to what will likely be outdated technology would risk taxpayer money and jeopardize our state election processes in the future.

In fact, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) recognized the need to update their 2005 standards and adopted new federal standards just two weeks after you released this RFP. Rushing into this RFP does not provide time for the vendors to re-certify their equipment for the new Federal standards that the EAC just adopted on February 10, 2021.

Additionally, these nationwide discussions will likely result in legislative changes that enact greater security, tracking, and transparency in voting procedures. I fear and predict that issuing a contract of this size, scope, and permanence during such a tumultuous time will prove to be irresponsible and ill-timed.

I believe the 2020 election cycle will prove to be an excellent opportunity for chief election officials and legislators across the country to examine the best election practices in both red and blue states. National groups such as the RSLC Commission on Election Integrity, which I serve on, are currently developing best practices to make it easier to vote and harder to cheat.

I encourage you to slow this process down, learn from other states' experiences, and put together a revised plan to make Louisiana the nation's preeminent leader in election integrity. Allowing time for increased public transparency around this bidding process will be a considerable first step towards rebuilding trust and confidence in our election systems.

In summary, I respectfully ask that you cancel this RFP and restart the process on a more transparent path.

Please know that our legislative committee takes our oversight responsibilities very seriously.

Should you choose to proceed with this flawed process, we will fulfill our oversight responsibilities and immediately schedule a Joint Governmental Affairs Committee meeting at the conclusion of the blackout period. This hearing will provide the public, legislative members, election experts, and the vendors an opportunity to offer the input that has been so tragically missing in your process thus far.

I look forward to partnering with you to rebuild public confidence in the state of Louisiana's election process.

Sincerely,



Sharon W. Hewitt, Chairwoman
Senate and Governmental Affairs

cc:

Ms. Paula Tregre

Chief Procurement Officer

Mr. Jay Dardenne

Commissioner of Administration

The Honorable Page Cortez
Senate President

The Honorable Clay Schexnayder
Speaker of the House

The Honorable John Stefanski
Chairman, House and Governmental Affairs

The Honorable Mack "Bodi" White
Chairman, Senate Finance

The Honorable Jerome "Zee" Zeringue
Chairman, House Appropriations