

COREY STAPLETON
SECRETARY OF STATE



STATE OF MONTANA

July 24, 2019

Stephanie Verhasselt
Richland County Clerk and Recorder
201 W Main
Sidney MT 59270

Hi Stephanie,

Thank you for your letter regarding the new voter registration system. As you know, I requested in writing what apprehensions may exist from MACR so that our dialogue can center on generally agreed upon issues and facts. I know that getting consensus from 56 diverse counties is challenging, so thank you for succinctly communicating the concerns of Elections Administrators (EAs) in your letter. Good job!

First of all, and perhaps most importantly, we're on the same page. The Office of the Secretary of State shares all of your stated concerns. (We have a few others, too.)

Secondly, there is a purpose to our ambitious timeline and methodology.

And thirdly, there were a handful of other factors which influenced (and continue to influence) the timeline and overall strategy of replacing MontanaVotes with ElectMT. I'll share some of those.

In 2016, both Arizona and Illinois had their voter registration systems hacked. Those were painful experiences for both states' elections personnel. When we are discussing the replacement of Montana's aged voter registration system, it's important that we include systematic risk alongside potential replacement timelines. The new system *will be considerably more functional and secure.*

The HAVA money was made available following the 2016 federal election, largely because of foreign meddling and security concerns during that presidential race. HAVA money is explicitly to be used by the states to increase the security of elections, and congressional intent was that we improve our systems sooner than later—not necessarily wait until the 2024 presidential cycle. If and when the Elections Assistance Commission (EAC) requests the status of Montana's \$3 million HAVA appropriation, we want to be on solid ground as to why it's in the best interest for Montana to wait until 2021 (or beyond) to implement a new voter registration system. In other words, if at all possible, in order to have the new voter registration system active for 2020, it was worth a try—assuming we could do it well.

When you and I spoke in Richland County a few months ago during our Things That Matter outreach tour, I committed to you (and MACR) that we would make this decision together, and that everyone would get an

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abundance of training. Odd-numbered years (like 2019, 2021) are ideal for implementing new election systems, and we want EAs working feverishly now gathering requirements for the new system—regardless of the future 'go live' date. Hence, the strategy of setting an ambitious training schedule this summer and fall.

So, I'm pleased with a couple things. I have been very happy with the level of participation of the counties as we have begun to work toward the new system. It's clear to me that most of the clerks like the new system, and they have been actively engaged in our working groups. Thank you for that. I'm also pleased with our SOS staff and project managers and their preparation. Our staff has extensive IT experience. I have personally overseen IT projects in all three branches of state government. In short, we have the most qualified team to lead this transition. The fact that SOS and EAs are closely aligned now, working on assignments, and gathering requirements bodes well for Montana's election system.

But we also have some challenges.

Our vendor's workload is strained as they complete work in Arizona and Washington state with projects that began before our project. This division of labor between states is common, for sure, but it does take away from the full potential of resources that could be used for Montana in 2019. Additionally, as Washington continues to work through their new voter registration system, we would be wise to adopt many of those 'lessons learned' for our own system. It makes sense that we incorporate some positive changes to our statement of work as we update projections for ElectMT.

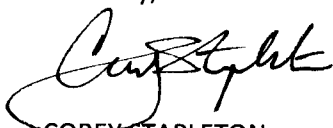
Even if all 56 clerks and SOS are fully onboard, fully trained and ready to go, we cannot move forward this year if our vendor doesn't have the capacity to deliver the system. And that's kind of 'where we are.'

So, what I propose is that we keep doing exactly what we are doing—gathering critical requirements for ElectMT and taking advantage of this non-election year. If we don't lollygag around this year, implementation should not take 3 ½ or 4 years for ElectMT (like it did with MontanaVotes).

It does not appear to me that we will be able to implement a new voter registration system this year. But we can still make considerable progress toward the system if we stay focused and intentional in our work. Or, as we say in Montana, let's make hay while the sun is shining!

Please let your fellow EAs know that our Office appreciates their hard work and support of ElectMT.

Sincerely,



COREY STAPLETON
Secretary of State

CS:sba