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Elections Chief Backs Out of Diebold Promotion

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[Maryland's](#) elections chief yesterday asked [Diebold Election Systems](#) to remove her from a sales and marketing brochure featuring her glowing endorsement of the company's electronic poll book after Gov. [Martin O'Malley](#) publicly criticized the promotion.

In a letter to the [Texas](#)-based company, Linda H. Lamone wrote that the publication's "apparent use for marketing purposes and the perception that I am providing a sales endorsement" was not what she had intended when she praised the product, which caused delays in last year's primary elections. "Accordingly, I am requesting that you immediately discontinue" distribution of the brochure.

O'Malley, in [Bethesda](#) to address the Greater Washington Board of Trade, said he was "disappointed" in Lamone, a fellow Democrat appointed in 1997 by [Gov. Parris N. Glendening](#) (D).

"She knows that she cannot be in a position as a public official endorsing any product," O'Malley said. "She should not have been in that position." However, he said he maintained confidence in her. Lamone answers to a five-member board appointed by the governor and has far-reaching authority over Maryland's local election boards.

A voting rights group said Lamone's starring role in the promotion is a conflict of interest because she led Maryland's effort to buy the touch-screen voting machines that Diebold manufactures. SAVEourVotes filed a complaint with the State Ethics Commission yesterday. State law prohibits a state employee from using the "prestige of office or public position" for private gain.

Maryland was one of the first states to adopt electronic voting in every precinct and added electronic poll books in September's primary. The technology allows election workers to verify quickly that voters are in the voter-registration database. But it crashed repeatedly, requiring time-consuming rebooting, and needed costly fixes to be ready for the November general election.

Lamone said Wednesday that she agreed to promote Diebold's "ExpressPoll-5000" to get out the message that the system had performed well in November.

"Our election judges just love this product, and so do I," she is quoted as saying in the brochure, next to a photograph of her in her office. Lamone said she was not paid for the endorsement.

Diebold officials called the brochure a "case study" of the poll books' success in Maryland. "The intent was to provide positive information associated with the product which was not covered in the media," said Mark Radke, Diebold's vice president of communication. "There seems to be some confusion about the intent of the case study."

Radke said the brochures were distributed at trade shows across the country in the past few months and will be reprinted without Lamone's endorsement.

Ten states have bought the company's poll-book product, which can reduce the time it takes to manually look up a voter's name from two minutes to 40 seconds, Radke said. But only Maryland and [Georgia](#) are using it in every precinct. Radke would not say why the company decided to feature Lamone and highlight the Maryland experience.

Lamone did not return a phone call yesterday. Deputy Administrator Ross Goldstein said she has "referred the issue to the appropriate state officials" at the ethics commission and would not comment.

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