

## Sanction of Touch-Screen Voting Machines Under Review

By Maryland Notebook  
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Montgomery County's ethics commission has agreed to look into the propriety of a four-year-old endorsement by county elections chief *Margaret Jurgensen* of touch-screen voting machines produced by [Diebold Election Systems](#).

*Robert Ferraro* of the advocacy group SAVEourVotes said Ethics Commission Executive Secretary *Barbara McNally* had agreed to put the matter on the panel's July 24 agenda. Ferraro said he believes that the endorsement, in a brochure featuring officials from other states, violates the county's ethics law. The [Montgomery](#) law forbids county employees from trading on the "prestige of their office."

McNally did not respond to a request for comment, but Ferraro provided an e-mail in which she confirmed that the panel would consider his claims.

Jurgensen said she hadn't seen the brochure, wasn't sure how old it was and had not been paid to endorse the voting machine. "I certainly haven't done anything with them in the past year," she said.

Diebold spokesman *Mark Radke* said the brochure with Jurgensen's endorsement was produced in 2003. He said he does not believe the company has produced any others in which Jurgensen is featured.

In last year's primary election, several polling places in Montgomery experienced problems with Diebold machines, which are being used throughout the state.

The Montgomery flap follows a similar complaint the group lodged last month against state elections chief *Linda H. Lamone* for endorsing Diebold's electronic poll book. Lamone asked the company to stop using her image and statements in promotional material after Gov. [Martin O'Malley](#) (D) criticized the promotion.

-- **Miranda S. Spivack**

### Pr. George's Board Field Jammed

Prince George's County Executive [Jack B. Johnson](#) (D) has a big choice to make: whom to name to fill a vacancy on the county's nine-member Board of Education. On Thursday, he announced that he has 39 applicants.

Yep, that many men and women want to occupy the school board seat vacated by [Nathaniel B. Thomas](#), who resigned last month after a grand jury indicted him in connection with an alleged sexual relationship with a 15-year-old boy.

Johnson said he will narrow the list to a group of finalists for interviews this week and will forward the name of his nominee to the County Council, which must confirm the choice, during the week of July 16.

The selection will be important for a school system trying to regain its footing after years of turmoil. In 2002, the General Assembly disbanded the county's elected school board, replacing it with an appointed one. Only this November did voters get a chance to choose representatives again, selecting nine men and women from a field of dozens of candidates.

Many residents have expressed deep disappointment over the Thomas case, which they believe has undermined the leadership of a school system that is otherwise receiving high marks for making improvements.

Johnson will get a chance to help mold the school board with his selection. His choice must go over well with the County Council, with whom Johnson has clashed repeatedly in recent years, including over key appointments. Johnson and council Chairman *Camille Exum* (D-[Seat Pleasant](#)) have indicated that they hope to complete the confirmation process before July 24, when the council breaks for summer recess.

The list of potential nominees includes several well-known names, including [Fort Washington](#) resident [Steven Morris](#). A retired educator, Morris ran in the November election, coming so close to defeating opponent *Linda T. Thomas* that it appeared he had won on the night of the election. Thomas was declared the winner by 885 votes only after provisional ballots were examined.

*Amber Waller* of [Hyattsville](#), who also ran in November, is also on the list. So too is *Judy Mickens-Murray*, who served on the appointed school board. The full list can be found at: <http://www.goprincegeorgescounty.com>.

-- **Rosalind S. Helderman**

### Commentator Lured Away

*Zach P. Messitte*, a political science professor at [St. Mary's College of Maryland](#) and frequent commentator on [Maryland](#) politics, is leaving to take an administrative post at the University of Oklahoma.

As director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Messitte helped put the tiny Southern Maryland honors college on the political map last year. His politics seminar became an unusual stomping ground for many statewide candidates, including former governor [Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.](#) (R), who flocked to the campus to speak with students.

A Maryland native who grew up in [Montgomery County](#), Messitte, 39, frequently comments on state politics for radio, television and print media. He has been appointed to a tenured faculty position at the [University of Oklahoma](#), where he will hold an endowed chair in geopolitics and serve as vice provost of international programs.

-- **[Philip Rucker](#)**

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