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**GOVERNOR O'MALLEY SIGNS VOTING PAPER TRAIL BILL
New, Less Expensive System Will Allow for Recounts**

Today Gov. O'Malley signed legislation that calls for replacing Maryland's paperless touch-screen voting system with a system that will provide a paper record to allow for recounts of close races. The "Voter-Verifiable Paper Records" bill, SB 392, was sponsored by Senator Edward Kasemeyer (D-Baltimore and Howard Counties) and passed the Senate unanimously. A companion bill, HB18, sponsored by Delegate Sheila Hixson (D-Montgomery County) passed the House unanimously both last year and this year. The transition will occur before the 2010 elections.

"This is a great victory for Maryland's voters, who overwhelmingly favor a paper record of their votes," said Robert Ferraro, a Co-Director of SAVE Our Votes, a grass-roots citizens' group working for Secure, Accessible, Verifiable Elections in Maryland.

Public opinion polls conducted last year showed that two out of three Maryland voters want a paper record of their votes. Most prefer an optical scan system where voters mark paper ballots, either by hand or with the assistance of a ballot-marking machine, which are then counted in the polling place by optical scanners. Nineteen of Maryland's 24 counties used optical-scan systems before state law required them to switch to touch-screen machines over the past five years.

Maryland's new law is part of a national trend away from paperless voting. After the loss of 18,000 electronic votes in Sarasota's 2006 election left a congressional seat in dispute, Florida's governor announced plans to replace its touch-screen voting machines with optical scanners before the 2008 elections. A federal bill currently making its way through the House of Representatives, the "Voter Confidence & Increased Accessibility Act" (HR 811), would eliminate paperless voting by the 2008 general election and provide funding to replace equipment that does not comply with the law.

Maryland's bill requires funding by next year's legislative session, through either state or federal dollars, for implementation to be accomplished on schedule. But the economic benefits of optical scan systems are especially attractive in a time of fiscal deficits when the new administration is looking for ways to reduce government waste to balance the budget. Studies have shown a large jump in election expenses when counties across the nation switched to paperless electronic voting.

"We look forward to working with the governor to find funding for this bill," said SAVE Our Votes Co-Director Rebecca Wilson. "In this time of tight budgets, we don't have the luxury of operating a voting system that is as fiscally wasteful as Maryland's current system is."

"Gov. O'Malley is a strong advocate for making government more transparent and accountable," said Co-Director Shelley Fudge. "This legislation will move Maryland a huge step in that direction."