

## Ohio Counties to Split \$114M in Voting Machine Funds

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(TNS) — Ohio is set to have new voting machines well before the 2020 presidential election, with the passage Wednesday of a bill allotting \$114.5 million to purchase the equipment.

The money will be disbursed across Ohio's 88 counties on a per-voter basis, meaning counties with more voters will get more funding. Additionally, \$10 million is set aside for counties that already have purchased new machines.

Ohio is in need of new voting machines because most of the current ones are from 2005 or 2006, when the federal government gave the state roughly \$115 million to purchase equipment through the Help America Vote Act. Technology has changed a lot since then; Secretary of State Jon Husted often notes that the original iPhone had not even been released when Ohio last got machines.

"In addition to the fact that the old equipment is just old, and as technology ages it has problems, there is just better stuff on the market that we want to get our hands on for our voters," said Aaron Ockerman, executive director of the Ohio Association of Election Officials. "Even the paper-based systems are far superior to what we are currently using."

About half of Ohio's counties use paper ballots that are optically scanned, and half use touch-screen voting. Counties will be able to choose which new equipment to purchase, but it must be approved by federal and state officials. Counties contacted by *The Dispatch* said they are still in the process of deciding what they want.

The Help America Vote Act was passed after the 2000 presidential election debacle involving "hanging chads" on punch-card ballots in Florida exposed a need for upgrades. The 2016 election, with official findings of Russian meddling, might have had the same impact.

"The timing is coincidental, but it is also good," Ockerman said. "We want to instill confidence in our democracy and confidence in our voting systems, and having new technology out there is a good thing."

Senate Bill 135 will give counties new voting machines by the 2019 election season — either the May primary or November general election — to make sure any kinks are ironed out before the busy 2020 presidential election.

"There is a learning curve associated with the new equipment, so it is much better to go through those bumps and figure the details out in a non-presidential election year," Ockerman said.

He said his organization has worked with counties for about five years to get legislation passed at the Statehouse. In most counties, the new equipment can't come soon enough.

"Our county is in desperate need of new voting equipment," said Jane Hanley, director of the Fairfield County Board of Elections.

For Delaware County Board of Elections Director Carla Herron, the news is both exciting and nerve-wracking.

"We are nervous because it is a big responsibility. Our board has to pick the right system for Delaware County and what will be right for the voters," Herron said. "Just about everything will need to be updated."

In addition to implementing the new equipment, instructions will need to be updated and poll workers trained, a time-consuming and costly process, Herron said.

The Franklin County Board of Elections will get an estimated \$10 million-plus to replace its equipment, according to spokesman Aaron Sellers. Whether that funding will cover the cost of the new machines remains to be seen, depending on what vendor and voting method the county chooses.

Old voting machines across the state will be turned back in to the vendors for a small credit, much like recycling.

The measure also will create a bipartisan committee to advise the secretary of state and the Department of Administrative Services about funding and acquiring new voting machines.

The bill now goes to Gov. John Kasich and will go into effect 90 days after being signed into law.

Even though counties will get funding this fall, the secretary of state's office is recommending that they wait to purchase the equipment until after the upcoming general election.

"There is a whole process to get paperwork signed and waiting 90 days from when it's signed into law, so having the equipment purchased and set up by November of this year would be cutting it pretty close," Ockerman said.

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<http://www.govtech.com/budget-finance/Ohio-Counties-Splitting-1145M-for-New-Voting-Equipment.html>