



GEORGIA'S SECURE & ACCURATE VOTING SYSTEM

BLAKE EVANS, STATE ELECTIONS DIRECTOR

OUTLINE

- Our current voting system
 - Uniform statewide paper ballot system
 - Selected by the General Assembly in 2019 (HB 316)
 - Audits of voter-verifiable paper ballots confirm accuracy of results
- Recent legislative updates
- Secretary of State recommendations for 2026
- Options for post-2026
- Key takeaways
- Q&A



CURRENT SYSTEM



WHAT SYSTEM DO WE CURRENTLY USE?

- Poll Books
- Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs)
- ImageCast Precinct Scanners (ICPs)
- ImageCast Central Scanners (ICCs)

All ballots produced by the voting system in Georgia are on security paper with a unique watermark.



WHY DO WE CURRENTLY USE THIS SYSTEM?

- House Bill 316 (2019)
 - Passed the House – 101 to 69
 - Passed the Senate – 35 to 21

19

HB 316/AP

House Bill 316 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)

By: Representatives Fleming of the 121st, Jones of the 47th, Burns of the 159th, Rynders of the 152nd, Watson of the 172nd, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 2 of Title 21 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
2 primaries and elections generally, so as to provide for definitions; to provide for uniform
3 election equipment in this state; to provide for ballot marking devices and standards and
4 procedures for such devices; to provide for the manner of qualifying presidential elector



WHY DO WE CURRENTLY USE THIS SYSTEM?

- SAFE Commission Recommendation

6. Given Georgia's history as a state that uses DRE's and the familiarity of voters and election officials with that method of vote casting, Georgia should move to a primarily ballot-marking device with verifiable paper ballots solution for a new voting system.

- SAFE COMMISSION Members

Co-Chairs

- Secretary of State Robyn A. Crittenden
- State Representative Barry A. Fleming

State Legislators

- State Representative James Beverly
- State Senator Lester Jackson
- State Representative and Secretary of State-elect Brad Raffensperger
- State Senator Brian Strickland

Elections Officials

- Lynn Bailey, Executive Director, Richmond County Board of Elections
- Nancy Boren, Director of Elections & Voter Registration, Muscogee County
- Deidre Holden, Supervisor of Elections & Voter Registration, Paulding County
- Darin McCoy, Probate Judge and Election Superintendent, Evans County
- Cynthia Willingham, Supervisor, Rockdale County Board of Elections & Voter Registration

Accessibility Expert

- Amy Howell, Assistant Commissioner and General Counsel, Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)

Cybersecurity Expert

- Wenke Lee, Co-Executive Director, Georgia Tech's Institute for Information Security & Privacy (IISP)

Voters At-Large

- James "Jimmy" McDonald, Managing Principal, McDonald Firm, LLC
- Sheila Ross, Director of Capital Litigation, Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia

Other Members

- Michael Jablonski, General Counsel, Democratic Party of Georgia
- Vincent Russo, Deputy General Counsel, Georgia Republican Party
- John Monds, Libertarian Party of Georgia, Executive Committee

H.B. 316 DEBATE: CURRENT SYSTEM V. HAND-MARKED

- Majority of Legislators chose current system as superior to hand-marked paper ballots because they argued it is **more accurate, more secure, and less vulnerable to fraud or error.**
- “Moving Georgia backwards to a pencil marked ballot system means that elections could be tampered with by anyone with a pencil since a stray mark can completely spoil a ballot or an eraser can easily change someone’s vote.”
- “Everything I do in my life tells me that machines are more reliable than my hand when it comes to marking something. And I do not believe that we need to go backwards as technology goes forwards.”
- “Paper ballots are the unfunded mandate.”
- “I would propose it only takes one simple item, one simple device, to hack a paper ballot. I keep it in my coat pocket. It’s a pen.”



SELECTION OF DEMOCRACY SUITE 5.5-A

- Current voting system vendor selected in 2019 after a competitive bidding process.
- The selected system was, and is, certified by the US Election Assistance Commission.
- The existing vendor contract runs through 2028.
- Screenshot from the US EAC “Certified Voting Systems” webpage:

Voting System (Name/Version) ▲	Manufacturer	Testing standard	Date Certified
Democracy Suite 5.5-A (Modification)	Dominion Voting Systems Corp	VVSG 1.0 (2005)	2019-01-19



HOUSE BILL 316 ADDED RISK LIMITING AUDITS (RLAS)

- O.C.G.A. 21-2-498
 - RLAs are required after statewide and/or federal elections.
- Georgia's first statewide RLA was in November 2020 following that General Election.
- Georgia has one of the lowest risk limits in the country for our RLAs.
- Our audits go above and beyond the requirements of an RLA.
 - Every county receives batches to audit (even if the RLA does not require it).
 - Every county audits a minimum of 2% of ballots.
 - Every county audits 1 hand marked batch and 1 BMD batch.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES



SENATE BILL 189, SECTION 7

- Intent of Section 7 of SB 189 is to clarify to that voter intent is controlled by the human-readable, printed text on the paper ballot, rather than by a bar code.

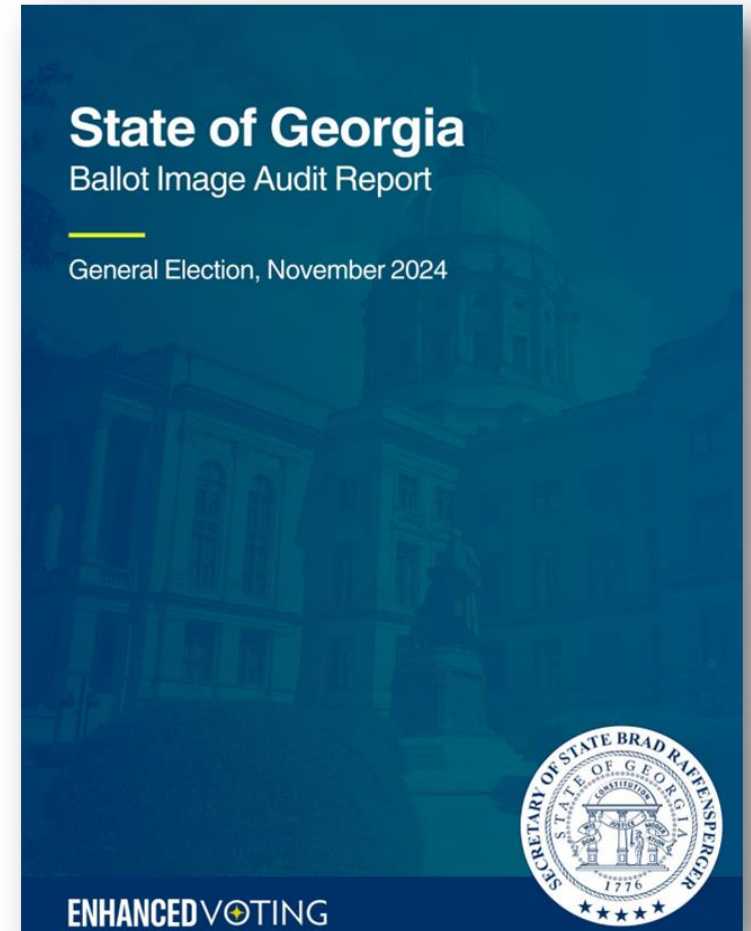
228 Section 21-2-498. The official tabulation count of any ballot scanner shall be based upon
229 the text portion or the machine mark, provided that such mark clearly denotes the elector's
230 selection and does not use a QR code, bar code, or similar coding, of such ballots and not
231 any machine coding that may be printed on such ballots."

- Effective date is July 1, 2026.
- No funding was appropriated by the General Assembly to implement any changes to the current voting system for 2026.



SENATE BILL 189, SECTION 11

- Section 11 of SB 189 authorized the Secretary of State to conduct a pilot program using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology to verify the accuracy of the tabulated results for every race on the 2024 General Election ballot.
- This pilot utilized groundbreaking OCR technology to tabulate votes based on the human-readable text on the paper ballots, which is verified by the voter, rather than the QR code.
- The tabulation based on the human-readable text confirmed the scanner tabulation with 100% accuracy.
- Cost of pilot program = \$1.7 million (majority one-time costs).
- Full report: <https://sos.ga.gov/page/ballot-image-audit>



COUNT OF HUMAN READABLE TEXT

Statistic	Value
Total Ballots	5,297,264
Total Ballots Audited	5,297,262 ¹
Summary Ballots Audited	5,025,863
Hand-Marked Ballots Audited	271,399
Contests Audited	1,955 (295 federal/state contests, 1660 local contests)
Ballot Styles Supported	6,647
Ballot Images Requiring Manual Review	13,719 (0.259% of the total ballots)
Ballots with Discrepancies	87 (see Table 3)



QR CODE ACCURACY CONFIRMED

Ballot Type	# Ballots	# Discrepancies	# Unreadable Images	Accuracy
Summary Ballot with QR Code	5,025,863	1	4 (see Table 4)	99.9999 %
Hand-Marked Ballots	271,399	86	0	99.9683 %

**A single discrepancy was identified in the audit with ImageCast X ballots and was traced back to a county adjudication mistake with a write-in vote (i.e. human error).*



QR CODE ACCURACY CONFIRMED

- Findings (taken directly from report):
 - *There were **zero differences found between the tabulation based on the human-readable text and the tabulation based on the QR codes generated by the Dominion ImageCast X ballot marking devices.** In every instance, the human-readable text on the paper ballots matched the votes represented in the QR code on that ballot.*
 - *A single discrepancy was identified in the audit with ImageCast X ballots and was traced back to a county adjudication mistake with a write-in vote (i.e. human error).*
 - *The only differences found in hand-marked paper ballots between the original count and the audit were attributable to voter intent interpretations made by reviewers at the county-level while reviewing the ballot images during the audit.*
 - *The audit confirmed the election results, and the associated winner(s), in **all 1,955 contests in the election (295 federal/state contests, 1660 local contests).***



OUR RECOMMENDATION



OUR RECOMMENDATION

- Make the pilot program permanent by authorizing and funding the continued use of OCR technology for 2026.
- Conduct two counts following elections in 2026 (Double-Blind Vote Counts):
 - Election Night Tabulation using the QR code consistent with Georgia law for fast reporting of results on election night.
 - Validation using the **human-readable text** on summary ballots before state certification.



OUR RECOMMENDATION

- Election Night Tabulation:
 - Scanners will tabulate based on QR codes.
 - This will allow fast reporting on election night.
 - County election officials can conduct their canvassing procedures and voluntary audits before county certification.
- Validation Count of printed text:
 - Before state certification, counties can upload their ballot images and a separate count based on the human readable text will be conducted.
- This Double-Blind counting method will confirm that the final certified outcomes are accurate.



OUR RECOMMENDATION

- Benefits of Double-Blind counting process:
 - Fiscally conservative and cost-effective transparency.
 - This will cost about \$300,000 per election, which will save tens of millions of dollars.
 - Increased voter confidence.
 - Utilizes Optical Character Recognition to verify tabulated results using voter-verified printed text on paper ballots.
- County election officials have proven they can do this efficiently.
 - This process was completed following the November 2024 General Election.
 - Full report: <https://sos.ga.gov/page/ballot-image-audit>



OTHER OPTIONS AFTER 2026



WHAT ARE OTHER OPTIONS?

- Update system software to Democracy Suite 5.20 and use Ballot Marking Devices that produce full-faced ballots.
 - The Secretary of State's Office requested funding for this project during the 2025 legislative session but did not receive it.
 - Project costs would range between about \$33,000,000 and \$57,000,000.
 - The variance in cost is due to printers and upgraded scanners.
 - This cannot be completed before July 1, 2026 deadline.



WHAT ARE OTHER OPTIONS?

- Move to hand marked paper ballots with machine tabulation.
 - This would require:
 - A major re-write of election law.
 - Many questions would have to be answered about how to conduct many election processes.
 - Examples:
 - How would recounts be conducted and how would voter intent be interpreted?
 - Would existing hardware be used or would new hardware be purchased?
 - Significant training of county election officials and poll workers.
 - Mobile ballot printers to be purchased for Advanced Voting locations, at a minimum.
 - For Election Day locations, counties would either need to pay to pre-print thousands of ballots, or mobile ballot printers would need to be purchased for Election Day locations.
 - At least a portion of scanners would need to be upgraded/replaced to accommodate larger ballots.



WHAT ARE OTHER OPTIONS?

- Move to hand marked paper ballots with machine tabulation.
 - This would require:
 - Additional hardware costs.
 - Estimated cost for mobile ballot printers at Advanced Voting locations - \$10,000,000
 - Estimated cost for mobile ballot printers at Election Day locations - \$17,000,000
 - Estimated cost for upgrading scanners - \$11,000,000
 - Cost for voter education?
 - Georgia voters have not voted on hand-marked paper in over 2 decades or more.
 - New scanning hardware?
 - Potential for significant increased cost for counties.
 - This cannot be completed before July 1, 2026.



WHAT ARE OTHER OPTIONS?

	Option 1 Speed Count with QR Code and Validation Count using Human- Readable Text	Option 2 Upgrade Dominion System to BMDs that Produce Full Ballot	Option 3 Move to Hand Marked Paper Ballots without Replacing Scanning Hardware	Option 4 New System
State Cost for 2026 Election Cycle	\$300,000 per election	\$33,000,000 to \$57,000,000	\$22,000,000 to \$38,000,000 + training costs	\$100,000,000 to \$200,000,000
Can it be completed by July 1, 2026?	Yes	No	No	No



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- The General Assembly should ensure that Georgia's next voting system is certified to the highest federal standards, which are expected to change over the next 1-2 years.
- The Election Assistance Commission is expected to update current Voluntary Voting System Guidelines (VVSG 2.0) in response to President Trump's Executive Order on Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections.
 - Excerpt from March 25, 2025 Presidential Executive Order (Section 4(b)(i)):
 - “The Election Assistance Commission shall initiate appropriate action to amend the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines 2.0 and issue other appropriate guidance establishing standards for voting systems to protect election integrity.”
 - The EAC has not yet made amendments to VVSG 2.0.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- VVSG 2.0
 - Adopted in February 2021.
- How many systems are currently certified to 2.0? One.

Voting System Name

Manufacturer

- Any -

Testing Standard

VVSG 2.0

Certification Date From

mm/dd/yyyy

Certification Date To

mm/dd/yyyy

Apply

Reset

Voting System (Name/Version) ▲	Manufacturer	Testing standard	Date Certified
Verity Vanguard 1.0	Hart InterCivic, Inc.	VVSG 2.0	2025-07-07



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- How many systems are currently being tested to VVSG 2.0 standards? Two.

Voting System Name

Manufacturer

- Any -

Testing Standard

VVSG 2.0

Apply

Reset

Voting System (Name/Version) ▲	VSTL	Manufacturer	Testing standard	Application Accepted Date	Phase of Test Campaign
VotingWorks VxSuite 4.0	SLI Compliance, a Division of Gaming Laboratories International, LLC	VotingWorks	VVSG 2.0	2025-01-14	System Under Test
VSR1 2.1	Pro V&V	Smartmatic USA Corporation	VVSG 2.0	2023-03-31	Test Report Approved



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Due to lack of funding and implementation time, it is not possible or prudent to make major changes to Georgia's voting system in the middle of a Gubernatorial year, where every major statewide position is expected to be an open seat.
- Georgia's voting system is proven, and it can continue to be used through 2026 to produce accurate results verified by double blind vote counts of every contest on every ballot:
 - Election Night Tabulation for Fast Results
 - Validation Count of Human Readable Text before State Certification
- Using Georgia's current system through 2026 provides the EAC with more time to amend the VVSG in response to President Trump's Executive Order, helping ensure that Georgia's next system is certified to the highest federal standard.
- Making major changes to election systems is always better to do in an odd year.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Georgia's elections are secure and voters have confidence in them.
 - 98% of voters had no issue casting a ballot.
 - 98.3% of voters gave high marks to poll worker job performance.
 - 98.5% of voters felt safe casting a ballot.
 - 96.2% of voters had a positive experience while voting.
 - 93.9% of voters found it easy to cast a ballot.
 - 91.5% of voters trusted the integrity of the process, with 95.4% of Conservative voters expressing that their vote was counted accurately, compared to 88.6% of Liberal voters.
 - 80.8% of voters experienced a wait time of less than 10 minutes.



**School of Public &
International Affairs**
Survey Research Center
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

2024 GEORGIA POST-ELECTION SURVEY

CONDUCTED BY THE SPIA SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER

DECEMBER 5, 2024

M.V. Hood III

PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

AND

DIRECTOR, SPIA SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER



QUESTIONS?

Thank you!

Blake Evans

State Elections Director

