To Chairs,
House Appropriations Committee,
House Ways and Means Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Maryland General Assembly

November 6, 2016 VIA email

I am an expert on the subject of voting system security, and am writing with concerns about the SBE'S post-election procedures for this year's election—a federal election affecting all US citizens. These procedures are being loosely referred to as audits, which they are not. In fact, because these procedures are not independent of the voting software and do not examine ballots, a finding of no discrepancy has no significance. Maryland's voters are denied the main benefit of using paper ballots—confidence in election outcomes. A number of the budget reporting requirements, which you have instituted, are likely to be violated if Maryland does not carry out a transparent and independent audit.

As you know, this year all of Maryland's voters will cast paper ballots that will be scanned and counted electronically. The purpose of the paper ballots is to provide evidence of voter intent independent of the voting technology used. Because computerized counts should not be accepted as unquestionably correct, the voter-verified evidence should be examined to ensure the election was called correctly.

The State Board of Elections, however, does not plan to look at the paper ballots that were verified by voters. Instead, it will provide the electronic scan data to another software company which will recheck the counts. Note that the electronic scan data, which was not verified by voters, is not like a true photograph. It is computerized data and hence vulnerable to tampering and error. Further, it is generated by the voting system and hence not independent of it. Moreover, the software company selected to recheck the counts has not had its system federally certified to tally elections.

According to the budget reporting guidelines, the State Board will need to explain why it began an audit of a computerized voting system by trusting

computer records produced by the same voting system. It is also required to report on the risk level of its post-election procedure. If the electronic scan data are different from the ballots, the risk of not detecting this is close to 100%. Although a pilot audit was performed in the primary, there has been neither a detailed public description of the proposed post-election process, nor a call for public comments. Finally, there appears to be no way in which the State Board could facilitate public observation of the proposed "audit", which happens inside the black-box computer.

I am writing to inform you that I have made an offer of help to the State Board of Elections, at no cost to the state, on behalf of a dozen experts including a computer science professor from MIT, a statistics professor and associate dean from Berkeley, and a political science adjunct faculty member from Columbia. We have collectively been involved in dozens of election audits in dozens of jurisdictions, and we are offering to come to Maryland to carry out a real audit in addition to its planned post-election procedures. This election is a particularly contentious one, repeatedly calling into question our considerable reliance on election technology. The country needs leadership on the issue of carrying out elections voters can have confidence in. Maryland could be that leader; it is in an enviable position because every one of its votes is cast on paper. However, if Maryland does not use the paper ballots to carry out a true audit, it is giving up the opportunity to lead, as well as reneging on its responsibility towards its voters.

Sincerely,

Poorvi L. Vora
Professor, Computer Science
The George Washington University
Contact Information Redacted