To: Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee

From: Secretary of the State Denise Merrill

Re: Summary of Internet voting symposium and corresponding recommendations

Date: December 30, 2011

Introduction

Sec. 58 of Public Act No. 11-173, "An Act Concerning Revisions to Elections Related Statutes," provides: "The Secretary of the State shall, within available appropriations, recommend a method to allow for on-line voting by military personnel stationed out of state. The Secretary shall look at what other states have done to reduce any potential for fraud in on-line voting and determine whether any such state's on-line voting system could be appropriate for adapted use by this state. Not later than January 1, 2012, the secretary shall, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, report any progress made toward recommending such a method to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to elections. "

In compliance with this requirement, I hereby submit this report in accordance with section 11-4a of the General Statutes to the Government Administration and Elections Committee for its review.

Background

The issue of providing our uniformed and overseas citizens the opportunity to vote is not new. Enacted in 1986, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) was designed to protect the voting rights of uniformed and overseas citizens regardless of where they are stationed. This law requires that states allow uniformed and overseas citizens and their family members residing outside the United States to register and vote in elections for federal offices.

UOCAVA was expanded significantly in 2009, when Congress passed the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act to provide greater protections for service members, their families and other overseas citizens. Among other provisions, the MOVE Act requires states to transmit validly-requested absentee ballots to UOCAVA voters no later than 45 days before a federal election. The greatest concern surrounding this change was that when election material left the control of the US mail service it could take a significant amount of time to reach the final destination. Research revealed that providing 45 days for voters to receive, vote and return their ballot would improve the system. In addition, the MOVE Act also required that each State have the ability to provide a blank ballot electronically to each voter upon request. Taking the initial mail time out of the equitation and allowing all 45 days for the voter to vote and return their ballot by mail significantly increased voting opportunities beyond those already achieved.

As a result of the changes discussed above, the State of Connecticut currently allows uniformed and overseas voters to request that a blank ballot be sent to them electronically 45 days before an election. Once received, the voter must vote and return their ballot in hard copy through the mail prior to the close of the polls on Election Day.

In addition, Connecticut also allows uniformed voters who will be absent because of a military contingency to request a blank absentee ballot as many as 90 days prior to an election. This is one of the most liberal timeframes available for uniformed voters. This ballot can be sent to the voter either by mail or electronically like the 45 day ballot discussed above. Once received, the voter must vote and return this ballot in hard copy through the mail prior to the close of the polls on Election Day.

On-Line Voting Symposium

On October 27, 2011 Secretary of the State Denise Merrill hosted and conducted an On-Line Voting Symposium. The symposium was undertaken in furtherance of the Secretary's obligation under Public Act No. 11-173, "An Act Concerning Revisions to Elections Related Statutes". The purpose of this symposium was to discuss the ability of voters to cast their actual votes on-line using the Internet, as opposed to the MOVE-act mandated electronic delivery to the voter and hard copy return. A digital audio-visual recording of this symposium is attached hereto and is intended to be part of this report.

The participants of the symposium included:
- Susan Dzieduszycka-Suinat - Overseas Vote Foundation
- Professor Alexander Shvartsman – Director of the Voting Technology Research Center at the University of Connecticut
- Professor Ron Rivest – Professor at MIT and Member of the United States Election Assistance Commission's Technological Development Committee
- Assistant Professor Alex Halderman – University of Michigan; and
- West Virginia Secretary of State Natalie Tennant

The event was moderated by John Dankosky of local public radio station WNPR and was co sponsored by the State Elections Enforcement Commission, the Commission on Veteran's Affairs, the Connecticut National Card and Central Connecticut State University's College of Arts and Science and Political Science Department, where the event was held.

The discussion during the symposium ranged from a description of the West Virginia pilot program of Internet voting conducted in 2010 to details of failed security measures used during similar attempts to conduct on-line or Internet voting. The discussion ultimately focused on security. Security was broken down into two different aspects, the integrity of the system and the ability of the system to keep voting information secret. Details were revealed about the computer attacks to the Washington D.C. on-line election portal. Users in a controlled experiment were able to gain control over the system in a

mere 48 hours; not only were vote totals changed but voter identities and how they voted were revealed.

While my office supports measures to provide opportunities for all eligible citizens of our state to participate in the voting process, these opportunities must be balanced against a process that is accurate and secure. Based upon the presentations during the symposium it is clear that Internet voting may be possible in the future but is not a realistic goal presently. Several panelists believe that Internet based voting may be as far as 20 years away. Finally, most computer scientists admit that Internet voting is vulnerable and that there are no known security measures in place or on the horizon to make it secure.

My review of on-line voting, conducted through this seminar and consideration of current literature on the subject, leads me to conclude that there is no existing, secure method of online voting that I could recommend to the Committee at this time.

 After you have the opportunity to review the symposium recording enclosed I would be happy to discuss any additional questions or concerns you may having regarding this issue.