

News Release

For Immediate Release:

November 6, 2007

For More Information Contact:

Neal Rosenstein (212) 349-6460

Aimee Allaud (518) 465-4162

Bo Lipari (607) 387-9308

Civic Groups Blast Department of Justice Proposal to Gut Standards for New Voting Systems

A Federal Takeover for Selecting New Voting Systems Not in Best Interest of New York Voters, Groups say

A coalition of civic groups harshly criticized a proposal made by the Department of Justice today that calls for the federal courts to consider taking control from the state and to select new voting systems for New York for the September, 2008 primary elections. The groups said DOJ's position endangered numerous safeguards for new voting systems that were won in state law, such as mandating that the computer code from voting systems be held in escrow in case of suspected problems with machines.

"DOJ's running roughshod over New York. We shouldn't be forced to buy voting systems that gut the important protections that voters won in state law," said Neal Rosenstein, Government Reform Coordinator for the New York Public Interest Research Group. "DOJ's position is that vendors won't be required to reveal the computer codes running their machines if problems arise with their systems. That could seriously undermine public confidence in election results," he added.

"The Department of Justice has made an mind-boggling claim - that while New York State has a right to require far higher voting system standards than those set by the Federal Government, we have no right to demand that voting machine vendors actually meet them," said Bo Lipari, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Verified Voting. "The DOJ would force New York to use voting machines that have failed again and again in other states, regardless of state laws designed to protect our votes."

The DOJ position was made in a motion submitted today to the federal court reviewing New York's implementation of the Help America Vote Act. That act and subsequent state law requires the state to replace its mechanical lever voting machines. In addition to asking the court to consider taking over the machine selection process, the Justice Department also called for all the state's lever machines to be replaced with new systems in less than a year, in time for the September 2008 primary elections.

"The DOJ's proposal to force a wholesale replacement of the state's lever machines in less than a year will most likely result in mass confusion at the polls," said Aimee Allaud, Election Specialist, League of Women Voters of NYS. "Lines for voting in Presidential years are already out the door in many locations. Imagine what will happen when you have to teach each voter how to vote over again on a new system and train the poll workers on how these systems work. It will be chaos," she added.

While the organizations lamented the slow pace that New York has undergone in the selection process, and the hopelessly gridlocked State Board of Elections, they said the DOJ's position could cause more harm than good in 2008.