

Voter Registration Modernization in Louisiana

Automatic Voter Registration Research Brief

The Open Democracy Project of Louisiana
March, 2016

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Executive Summary

Louisiana is a national leader on the path to automatic voter registration and voting modernization. During tough economic times, the state must make strategic investments in cost-saving voting technology like iPad voting which could save the state \$1.65 billion dollars to replace over 10,000 outdated voting machines. HB 599 would further cost savings by allowing for the Secretary of State's office to work with the Office of Motor Vehicles to implement automatic voter registration. Through automatic voter registration, legal citizens' verified information is securely transferred from the Office of Motor Vehicles and other government offices to the Louisiana Secretary of State's Office. Louisianan's will be automatically registered to vote unless they choose to opt out. The automatic voter registration process saves money, time, prevents errors to ensure only eligible citizens are on the rolls, gives people the freedom to decline registration, and ensures that every time someone moves, their voter registration information is automatically updated at any designated government office. Historically, Louisiana has led the way in adopting voting technology and should continue its leadership in this arena.

Updating Louisiana's Voting System

The Louisiana Secretary of State's office is responsible for maintaining the state's voter registration system. Parish clerks of court are the chief election officials at the parish level. In December 2015, Secretary of State Tom Schedler (R) proposed replacing Louisiana's 10,000 outdated voting machines with iPad voting machines over the next few years starting with the largest parishes first. This proposal is a cost-saving measure in the midst of tough budgetary cuts. To replace existing machines would cost \$5,200 per machine or \$1.8 billion dollars versus \$300 per iPad at a total cost of \$45 million.

Representative Randall Gaines (D) recently pre-filed HB 599, another cost-saving measure to introduce automatic voter registration through the Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles. Louisiana is already national leader on the path to automatic voter registration. The state already allows 16 year olds to pre-register to vote, the technology to transfer voter information from the DMV to the Secretary of State's office is already in place, and the state allows for electronic registration online via the Secretary of State website. In addition, voters can register at state and federal benefits offices.

Automatic voter registration allows for state agencies that thoroughly verify legal American citizenship status can transfer voters' information to the Secretary of State's office so that voters are automatically registered to vote unless they choose to opt out of being registered. The automatic voter registration process saves money, time, prevents errors to ensure only eligible citizens are on the rolls, gives people the freedom to decline registration, and ensures that every time someone moves, their voter registration information is automatically updated at any designated government office. HB 599 is a cost saving measure for the entire State of Louisiana.

According to the Louisiana Secretary of State, there are approximately 2,910,086 registered voters on the rolls with the possibility of adding tens of thousands to the rolls by 2018, allowing Louisiana to potentially maximize citizen participation in the democratic process. Automatic Voter Registration is the natural next step for the state of Louisiana's electoral accountability to its citizens.

Louisiana History: Leading Voting Technology

Louisiana introduced the first voting machines from the Shoup Voting Machine Corporation in Orleans Parish in the 1940s and then added the machines to East Baton Rouge, Calcasieu, and Caddo parishes. Voters cast their votes by pulling a mechanical lever. In 1952, Governor Robert F Kennon passed legislation to provide voting machines for every parish in the state. The original machines were large machines weighing over 1000 pounds and some had to be transported by boat or barge to areas isolated by water.



Early voting machines used levers and weighed over 1000 pounds

In 2006, Louisiana began utilizing **Help America Vote Act (HAVA)** federal funds to modernize our state's voter registration system with electronic voting machines that are smaller and more accessible for the elderly and disabled.



In 2007, then Secretary of State Jay Dardenne introduced “**Geaux Vote**”, a comprehensive online portal and mobile app that voters can use to begin the **Online Voter Registration** process and find up to date information on where to vote and which candidates and issues are on their ballots.



As the state's 10,000 voting machines need replacement, now is the time for the state to pursue automatic voter registration and iPad voting to save the state over \$1.6 billion dollars.



Average Costs for Automatic Voter Registration

The average cost of automatic voter registration for the three states that have implemented this measure was under \$1million. New Jersey invested \$379,000. Oregon invested \$753,455 in federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds, and California invested \$640,000 in general funds. The average cost for initial implementation was \$590,000. From 2003 to 2015, Louisiana was eligible to receive \$4.9 million in federal funds from the US Elections Assistance Commission, of which less than \$1 million was invested in voting technology in Louisiana.

Impact of Automatic Voter Registration on Special Populations

There are several special populations who will particularly benefit from automatic voter registration in Louisiana.

Military

Despite their service to our country, members of the US military face challenges when registering to vote. Military voters are 20% less likely to vote than the general population. If Louisiana implements automatic voter registration, state governments would automatically register all voting-eligible citizens captured in other government lists, including active duty military personnel and their families, and veterans. Election officials would track military voters' address changes, and update their registration records regularly, based on accurate address change information provided to other government agencies, and the Louisiana Secretary of State's office would ensure that all Americans especially those serving our country are registered to vote, accurately, and with up-to-date information.

Elderly and Disabled

Mobility challenges among the elderly and disabled create extra hurdles for those who wish to register to vote. In Louisiana, the elderly and disabled can already complete voter registration forms at local disability offices. By automatically transferring verified citizenship information from those offices to the Secretary of State's office to allow for automatic voter registration, Louisiana will create more opportunities for elderly and disabled to participate in elections.

Rural

More than one in four Louisiana voters live in rural areas. Currently, rural Louisianan's often have to spend hours traveling long distances to and from their nearest government offices to obtain a driver's licenses or access public

benefits. If their identifying information could be automatically transferred to the Secretary of State's Office, it could make the process of voter registration more seamless for rural voters.

Students

Students on college campuses often move frequently. Louisiana law gives students the right to register at their school address or remain registered at their home address. Automatic voter registration would ensure that any time a student moves and updates their information with local government authorities, their current information will be automatically transferred to the Secretary of State's office, eliminating the challenges students might otherwise face to register to vote.

Formerly Incarcerated Persons

Once formerly incarcerated persons are off of parole and or probation, they are legally allowed to participate in elections. Through automatic voter registration they would be added to the voter rolls once they apply for a State ID or driver's license.

Recommendations for Implementation

The Louisiana Secretary of State's Office should work collaboratively with the state Office of Motor Vehicles to implement automatic voter registration. The Office of Motor Vehicles has the capacity to verify that only legal US citizens' information would be transferred to the Secretary of State's office and any who wish to opt out of automatic voter registration would have the opportunity to do so.

Pro	Con
<p><u>Anti Fraud</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registers all <i>eligible</i> citizens <p><u>Cost Efficient</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Saves State and Agencies Dollars; Asset to Budget Shortfalls <p><u>Ready Infrastructure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DMV, Registrar of Voters and the Secretary of States Office currently has infrastructure and process in place to support electronic registration. Sixteen year olds can pre register to vote at the DMV, and the Secretary of State boasts a robust website which includes Online Voter Registration. 	<p><u>Start up Costs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential for this may rest in federal appropriations. For its implementation process Oregon utilized Help America Vote Act dollars to cover overall implementation costs. - State budget shortfalls <p><u>Public & Legislative Will</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conservative majority statehouse

Timeline

What	Who	When
Work with the Secretary of State's Office to develop a cost and implementation analysis for automatic voter registration at the state level.	Chairman of the House Committee on House and Governmental Affairs, representatives from The Secretary of State's office; the Commissioner of Elections; the Attorney General; the Department of Public Safety and Corrections; public safety services; and the Louisiana Registrars of Voters Association.	Statutorily required to convene before February 14, 2016
Work with the local Registrars of Voters Offices to develop a cost and implementation analysis for automatic voter registration at the local level	See above	See above
Develop a bill to allow for automatic voter registration by 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Rep Randall Gaines • Automatic Voter Registration Coalition 	Spring Legislative session 2016
Secretary of State's Office works with local Registrar of Voters to implement automatic voter registration.	Secretary of State's Office, Office of Motor Vehicles, Registrars of Voters	January 2017
Louisiana lobbies Congress and the Election Assistance Commission for Help America Vote (HAVA) dollars to modernize voting systems in Louisiana to incorporate iPad voting machines	The Governor's Office	July 2016 -2017
Louisiana implements iPad Voting	Secretary of State's Office	January 2018

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to SOLVE, Alternate ROOTS - The Nathan Cummings Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and The Kresge Foundation

The Open Democracy Project would like to express our gratitude to the following people and organizations for their contributions to this research brief:

- La. Representative Randall Gaines, District 57
- Denora Getachew, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
- Henry Kraemer, Bus Federation (Oregon)
- James Scwab, Chief of Legislative Affairs Office of Secretary of State Alex Padilla (California)
- Monica Holman Evans, Director of Grants Management - U.S. Election Assistance Commission
- Kim Williams, Solutions for Better Living
- The AVR Coalition: Urban League, NAACP, SCLC, Courts Matter, Crescent City Media Group, Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy Loyola University, Northshore Black Elected Officials Coalition, Councilwoman Mary Morris, Paul Geary, The Advocacy Center, Jacques Morial, Julie Harris, BISCO.

Resources

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