Heard in Government Operations Interim Committee 9/16/2026

Cost of Elections

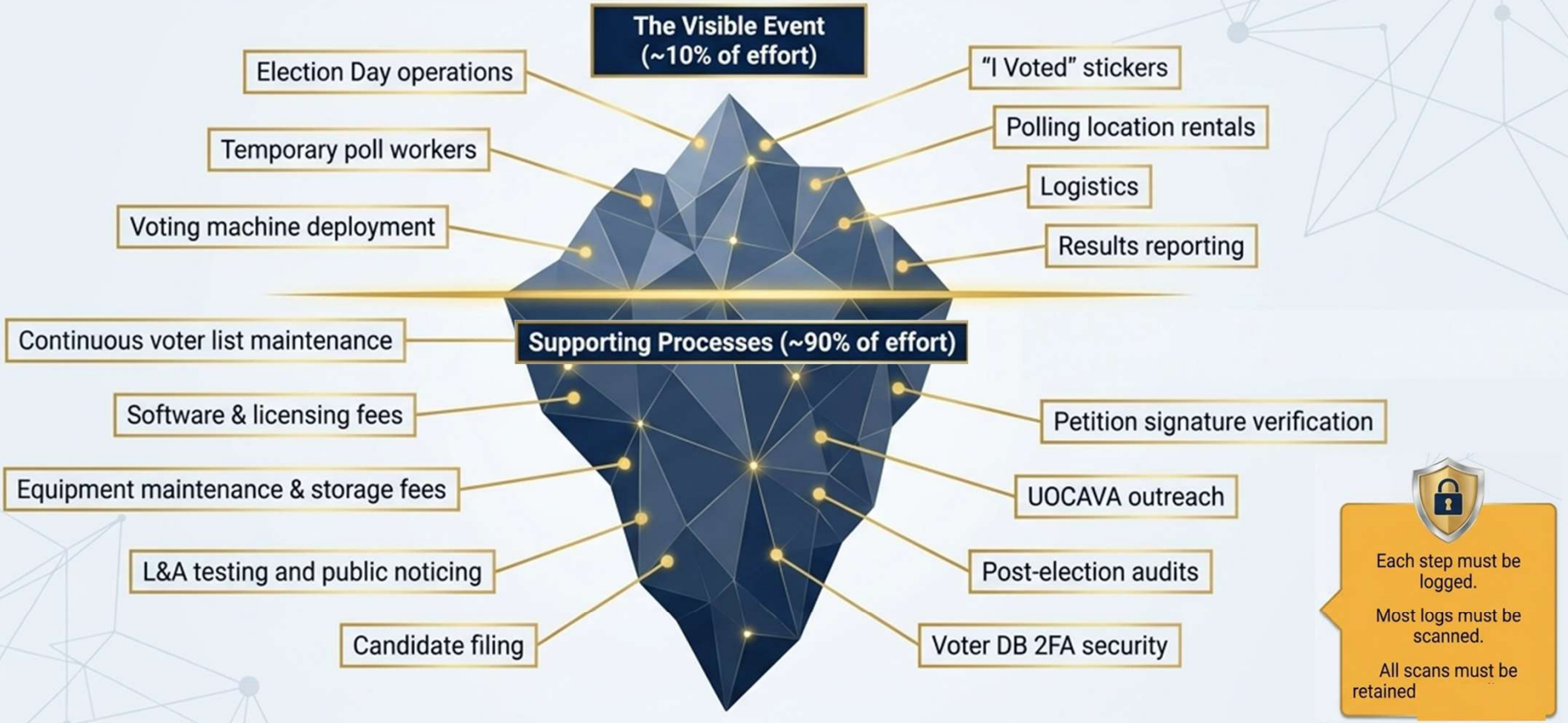
UTAH ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

The Unifying Voice for County Government

Ricky Hatch, CPA, CERA, VOTE Certified

Weber County Clerk/Auditor

The Iceberg of Election Administration



Elections are a continuous, year-round civic enterprise. Funding models based solely on "Election Day" events fail to capture the true baseline cost of secure infrastructure.

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40+ Data Points Collected from each county

- Active voters
- Clerk salaries
- Election staff wages
- Seasonal staff wages
- Poll worker wages
- Employees “borrowed” from other depts
- Outer envelope printing
- Return envelope printing
- Cost of inserts
- Cost of “I voted” stickers”
- # of vote centers
- Printer setup fees
- Printer insertion fees
- Ballots
- Test deck printing
- USPS Business Reply Mail subscription
- Outbound postage
- Return postage
- Undeliverable rate
- Cure letter rate
- % of ballots returned via USPS
- Voter turnout for 4 types of elections
- % of ballots returned via drop box
- % of votes cast in person
- # of drop boxes (outdoor, indoor, bags)
- # of drop box cameras
- Cost of camera connection/video storage
- # of signature verification computers
- # of precinct scanners
- # of central scanners
- # of election system servers
- # of election system workstations
- ADA ballot marking devices
- Electronic poll books
- E-poll book label printers
- Vote center ballot printers
- Envelope openers – large
- Envelope openers – medium
- Envelope openers – desktop
- Election system vendor site support
- Vote center touchscreen machines
- Encrypted election system thumb drives

WHAT HAPPENS TO COUNT ONE VOTE?

A complex, multi-step process with many people, systems, and safeguards

1. PRE-ELECTION
Prepare & Send

1 Ballot design & proofing
- Ballot layout set and proofed
- Content reviewed for accuracy and compliance

2 Ballot is Printed
- Ballot personalized with voter info
- Envelopes & inserts prepared
- Privacy sleeve & "I Voted" sticker included

2. RETURN & RECEIPT
Secure Return

3 Voter Returns Ballot
- By mail (prepaid return envelope)
- Or via secure drop box
- Drop boxes monitored by camera

4 Collected Securely
- Drop box opened by bipartisan team
- Security seals & chain of custody maintained
- Ballots transported to processing center

3. PROCESSING
Verify & Prepare

5 Envelope Processed
- Logged & scanned
- Detabbed
- Vote history retrieved
- Signature & last 4 of ID verified
- Challenges & cures (if needed)

6 Ballot Prepared
- Envelope opened
- Ballot extracted & examined
- Damaged ballots replicated (if needed)
- Ballot unfolded & readied for scanning

7 Ballot Scanned
- Scanned on secure equipment
- Adjudication of any issues
- Digital image stored
- Ballot placed in secure storage

4. TABULATION
Count & Record

8 Vote Tabulated
- Votes recorded in election management system
- Results included in reporting
- Multiple security checks & reconciliations

5. POST-ELECTION
Reconcile & Audit

9 Audits & Reconciliations
- Logic & accuracy (L&A) testing
- Post-election audit
- Reconciliations performed & posted
- Results certified

THE RESULT
Your Vote Counts

10 Your Vote Counts
Accurate, secure, and verified.

ONE BALLOT. MANY STEPS. MANY PEOPLE. MANY COSTS.

Dozens of people involved
Election staff, temporary workers, vendors, and county departments

20+ cost categories
From printing and postage to technology, staffing, equipment, and audits

Multiple layers of security and verification
By law, for public confidence and election integrity

Year-round work
Planning, equipment maintenance, training, and system updates

Election Costs to Counties

$15.3M per year

Infrastructure / Technology

$2.8M

Ongoing Costs

$3.6M

“Event” Costs (2 elections per year)

$8.9M

2 Elections/year Costs Counties $15.3 Million ($8.62 per voter)*

Share of total annual election costs

MOSTLY FIXED IN NATURE

$6.4M combined **annual** cost

Infrastructure / Technology

$2.8M ($1.60)

Ongoing Costs

$3.6M ($2.03)

MOSTLY VARIABLE IN NATURE

$8.9M **annual** event costs

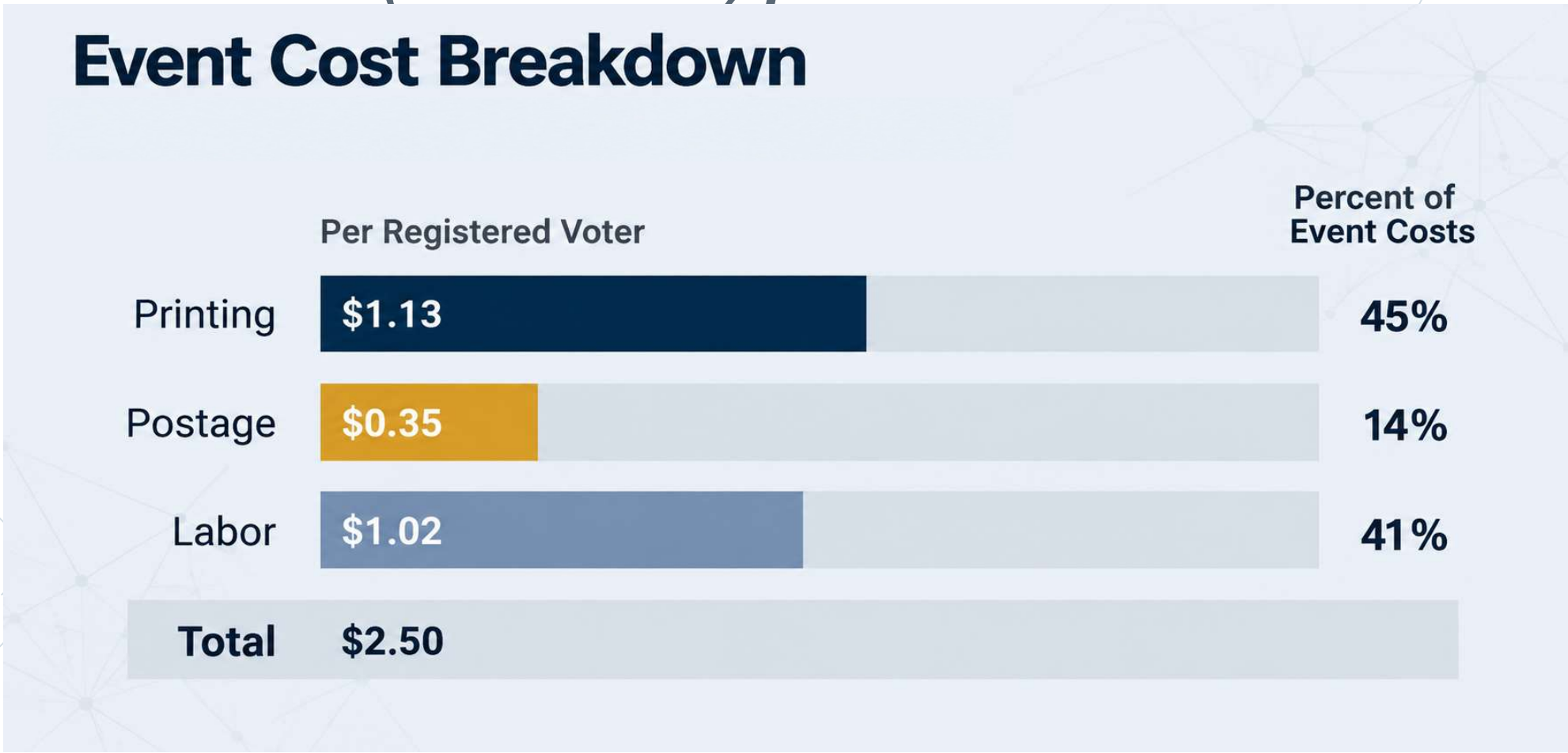
“Event” cost of a single election

$4.45M ($2.50)

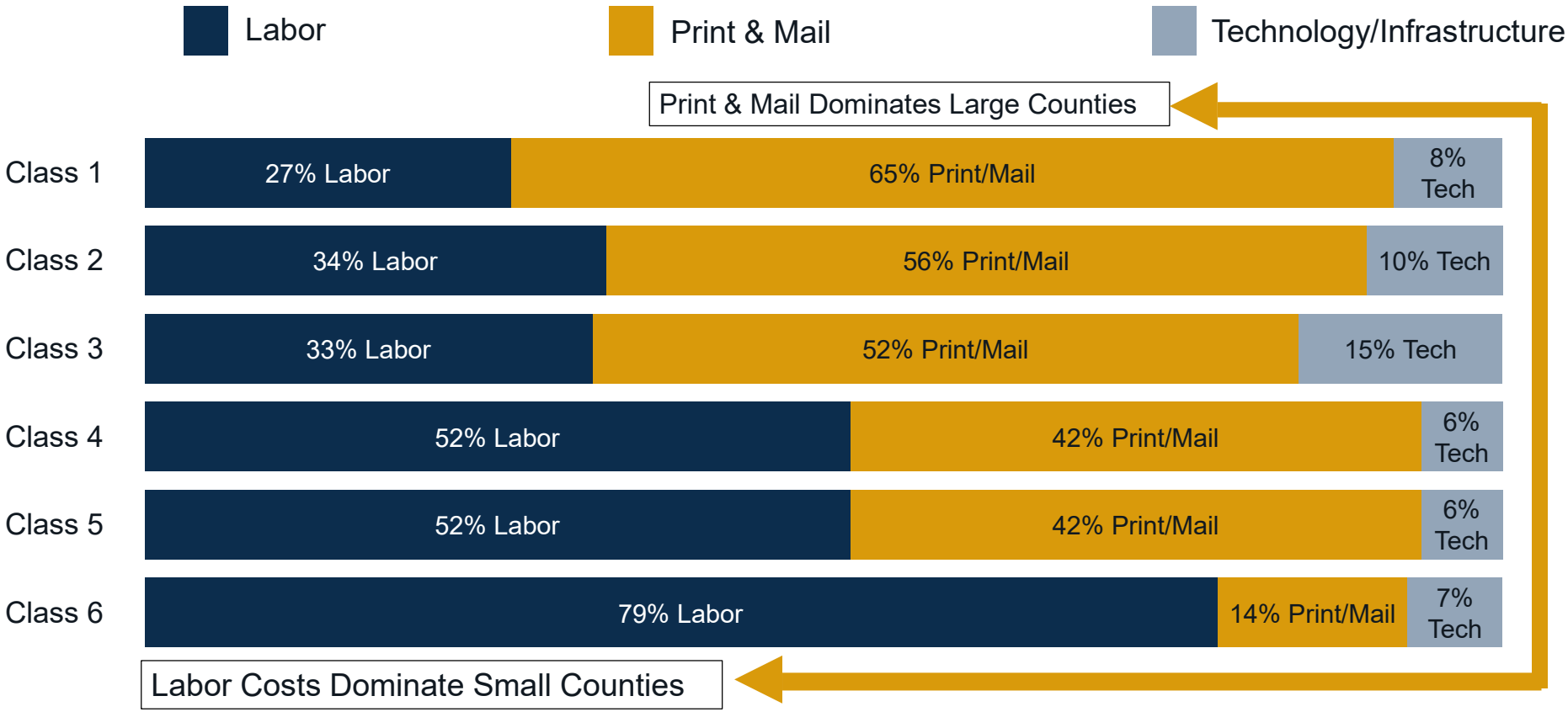
*Note: If only one election were held per year, the annual per-voter cost would be $6.13

Election “Event” Costs <u>per ballot mailed</u> (to active registered voters)

$4.45M ($2.50/voter) per Election “Event”

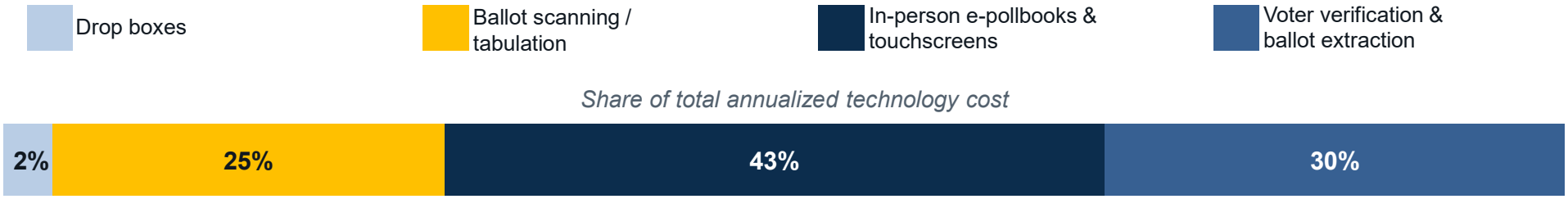


Cost Distribution by County Size



Election Technology Costs by Function

• One-time equipment cost*: $13.7M • Annualized technology cost**: $2.9M per year • $1.60 per active registered voter per year



Function	One-time	Ongoing / yr	Annualized*	Share	$/voter
Drop boxes	$0.6M	$54K	$54K	2%	$0.03
Ballot scanning / tabulation	$3.3M	$246K	$722K	25%	$0.41
In-person e-pollbooks & touchscreens	$5.9M	$332K	$1.2M	43%	$0.69
Voter verification & ballot extraction	$3.9M	$351K	$846K	30%	$0.48

** Based on historical purchase price. Some purchases were made as long as 10 years ago. Replacement cost will be significantly higher.*

*** Annualized cost = annual maintenance + depreciation based on the useful life of each asset*

Per Ballot Cast: High-Turnout vs. Low-Turnout Election

Turnout dramatically affects the cost per-ballot cast

$4.45M	**event cost per election ÷ ballots cast**	**= cost per ballot cast**

HIGH-TURNOUT EXAMPLE – 87%

Presidential General

$2.88

per ballot cast

More ballots spread the event costs across a larger turnout base

3.3× higher

LOW-TURNOUT EXAMPLE – 27%

Municipal Primary / Runoff

$9.41

per ballot cast

Fewer ballots spread the event costs across a smaller turnout base

Note: This includes ONLY the “event” (variable) costs

Cost Modeling: In-Person vs. Voter's Choice

In-Person Voting Method	Voter's Choice Voting Method
Significant up-front investment in equipment (e-poll books, voting equipment)	Lower equipment costs
Significant logistical costs (equipment delivery, setup, testing) and significant labor costs	Lower logistical and labor costs
Lower printing and postage costs	Significant printing and postage costs
Total cost decreases in low-turnout elections	Costs remain consistent across high- and low-turnout elections

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The Legislative Load: 2025 & 2026 Sessions

HB300S4: Amendments to Election Law	**SB164S2:** Modifications to Election Law	**HB027S1:** Voting Precinct Amendments	**SB054S1:** Appearance of a Candidate Name...	**HB263S1:** Election Record Amendments
HB002S3: Signature Gathering...	**HB0032S3:** Signature Gathering...	**HB0457:** Municipal Annexation Amendments	**HB0209S2:** Voting Amendments	**HB0242:** Initiative and Referendum...
HB069S4: Ballot Information Accessibility...	**HB069S4:** Ballot Information Accessibility...	**HB0033:** Political Signs Amendments	**HB356S2:** County Governance Amendments	**HB356S2:** County Governance Amendments
SB073S3: Statewide Initiatives Amendments	**SB073S3:** Statewide Initiatives Amendments	**SJR2:** Ballot Q: Const'l Const'l Amed	**SB053:** Election Code Amendments	**HB009:** Election Code Amendments
SB053: Election Code Amendments	**HB109:** Municipal Elections Amendments	**HB109:** Municipal Elections Amendments	**SB053:** Election Code Code Amendments	**HB0311S.2:** Election Amendments
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SB0153 S4: Election Election Amendments	**SB0153 S4:** Election Election Amendments	**SB0321:** Municipal Election Amendments	**HB0361S4:** Elections Provisions Amendments	**HB0361S4:** Elections Provisions Amendments
HB504S1: Financial & COI Disclosures...	**HB481:** Ballot Proposition Requirements	**HB551S1:** Elected Official Publicity...	**SB145:** Technical SD Boundary Adjustment	**SB145:** Technical SD Boundary Adjustment
SB0194 S5: Election Modifications	**HB0420:** Municipal Office Vacancy...	**HB0420:** Municipal Licensing Amendments	**SB136S1:** Election Modifications	**SB290S1:** Candidate Licensing Amendments
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2018 Legislative Funding

$4.5M one-time funding to purchase & install equipment

Covered 70%

$500K ongoing for 10 years to cover annual maintenance costs

Covers 50%

THANK YOU!

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