

PRESS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: Immediate
March 11, 2009

Contact: Erie County Board of Elections (Ralph M. Mohr, Commissioner) 716-681-3305

LEVER MACHINES TO BE USED IN VILLAGE ELECTIONS

Erie County Board of Elections officials announced today that the traditional lever style voting machines will again be used in next week's village elections. The announcement is a set back for the Erie County Board of Elections and the eight villages across the county who had been gearing up over the past two months to conduct their elections through the use of new optical scan technology.

Up until today, Board officials and clerks in the villages of Akron, Alden, Angola, Blasdell, Depew, North Collins, Orchard Park and Sloan had intended to implement a new voting method currently under certification testing by the state. They were forced to change those plans however when the manufacturer, Election Systems & Software, abruptly rescinded on their offer to make the new devices available for next week's village elections.

Although election officials have uniformly maintained that the traditional lever style machines are more accurate and reliable than new voting technologies, state law bans the future use of lever voting machines once the state has certified another voting system. Two vendors - Election Systems & Software and Sequoia Voting Systems - have submitted machines for state review. Both devices optically scan paper ballots which have been marked manually by the voter or by an electronic marking device.

The ability to realize lower costs and better monitor the accuracy of the equipment prompted the Erie County Board and eight villages to seek an introduction of the new voting machines next week rather than delay until the time of a state-wide conversion. The project would have also provided valuable data as to the reliability and accuracy of optical scan technology during the course of an actual election.

Performance and design problems have been documented with earlier versions of optical scan systems in other states. Last year, optical scan machines made by Elections Systems & Software failed pre-election tests in one Michigan county and produced conflicting vote totals in other areas. One election official noted that the same ballots run through the same machines, yielded different results each time.

The eight villages across Erie County would have deployed newer optical scan devices incorporating technology which had been successfully used in Florida during the presidential election last year.

"It made sense for the Board and the villages to pursue the pilot project in light of the State Legislature's impending ban on the use of our current voting machines. Unfortunately, the fact that the manufacturer pulled out of the pilot project at the last minute indicates to me a lack of confidence in its own system," Commissioner Mohr stated. "The lever style machines will afford voters and candidates the confidence in the integrity and accuracy of the voting process during this election," he concluded.