

Support for VotingWorks open-source voting pilot proposal

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Dear San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Director of Elections John Arntz, and Elections Commission:

I served on the San Francisco Elections Commission for two years from May 2018 to March 2020, including as Vice President in 2019. I also completed a PhD recently at UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy. My focus was on reforms that can improve democracy in the United States.

I understand that the San Francisco-based nonprofit VotingWorks recently offered to help San Francisco conduct a small pilot of its open-source paper-ballot voting system during the November 2022 election. Based on my experiences on the Elections Commission, my knowledge of VotingWorks, and my perspective on voting reform, I want to encourage you to accept this offer.

I have been following VotingWorks since the fall of 2018. With its focus on open-source paper-ballot voting, I can attest that VotingWorks is a good organization and effective in its mission. I even started donating to the organization as a result. VotingWorks' progress in completing the development of an open-source paper-ballot voting system is a remarkable achievement—one that benefits everyone, because open source is available to everyone. No other organization in the United States, nonprofit or for-profit, has come close to developing a complete open-source voting system.

Developing an open-source voting system was one of the City's goals while I served on the Elections Commission. During that time, I saw many challenges faced by both advocates and the City and County itself. The consulting firm the City hired to assess the project estimated it would cost between \$12 million and \$28 million for design and development alone. In the spring of 2018, the Elections Commission asked the City to budget an initial \$4 million to start the project. Later that year, the Board of Supervisors and Mayor were able to set aside just under \$1.3 million. However, this seed money was largely taken away when the pandemic hit, leaving no remaining resources and no path to progress.

Fortunately, VotingWorks' own progress in the meantime means that San Francisco no longer has to spend millions of dollars and years of time developing its own system. VotingWorks' offer to conduct a pilot creates an opportunity for San Francisco to try an open-source system in a limited setting—at no cost to the City—all while receiving oversight from the California Secretary of State under the California Elections Code. In February 2018, the City's RFP for a new voting system had only one bidder: the City's current vendor, Dominion. If VotingWorks' system is successful in a pilot, it means that San Francisco's next voting system RFP would very likely have an open-source option. This extra option would help lower costs for the City's next voting system contract and thus free up taxpayer dollars for other City initiatives.

Moving forward with a pilot during the November 2022 election can do much to realize one of the City's goals of increased election transparency through open-source voting, and it can do so at

little or no cost to the City. In doing so, San Francisco can be a participant in bringing about open-source voting and be a leader for all counties in California in the process.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Hill