Statement on Enhanced Election Security – Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Remote Ballots Project

The San Francisco Bay Area is committed to making voting more accessible for people with disabilities. Concurrently, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) identified elections security as a national priority area and its homeland security grant program requirement. To meet the needs of these priorities, the Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative (BAUASI) consulted with the San Francisco Department of Technology, Department of Elections (DOE), and Mayor's Office of Disability as subject matter experts and, identified an identity and access management project to increase accessibility for people with disabilities and enhance elections security.

We understand there remains confusion about this project, with many concerned that this project will develop an internet voting platform. The BAUASI will modify the project to better understand the needs of people with disabilities and ensure alignment with the DHS security grant program priorities. The project will be conducted in two phases:

PHASE 1 (December 2021 – June 2022):

Planning funds ($550,000) will be used to hire a consultant to conduct a gap and needs analysis and strategy report of the UASI's 14 jurisdictions. The purpose is to understand better the needs and challenges of people with disabilities to independently participate in the elections process and discuss options.

PHASE 2 (June 2022 – December 2022):

Equipment funds ($1,000,625) will be used to purchase, design, develop and test software, hardware, and licenses to enable disability voting. Procurements will be based on feedback received from needs analysis and a review of national best practices. The grant requires equipment purchase to be completed within the grant's performance period, which ends on December 31, 2022.

Proposed Phase 2 Modification: As a substitution for phase 2, BAUASI will not move forward on pursuing identity and access management technology but instead focus on an equipment purchases that enhance voting accessibility for people with disabilities. Additional technology options which are acceptable under current election regulations may be considered based on the needs analysis findings and grant availability.

We look forward to partnering with local government entities (e.g., Bay Area Departments of Information Technology, Offices of Disability, and Departments of Elections) and engaging with the disabled community to make voting more accessible for people with access and functional needs while addressing the national priority of safe and secure elections.

Background Information

The general nature of this project was initially discussed at the July 2020 Elections Commission meeting (attached Elections Report), whereby the project's focus was to consider technology that allowed people with disabilities to vote independently and privately when voting-by-mail or using a remote accessible vote-by-mail system.

The need for this project is based on the requests from the Mayor's Office on Disability and the City's Disability Council (see attached letter of support). For instance, people with mobility limitations often cannot sign their return envelopes containing their voted vote-by-mail ballots. Also, people who are blind often don't have printers and cannot print their ballots at home if they use a state-approved remote accessible vote-by-mail program. The Mayor's Disability Council requested the City to consider tools to resolve such challenges.

A few ideas were considered when brainstorming about addressing these concerns, including having voters save their ballots on their phones and then visit Elections to have their ballots printed. Such ideas were merely discussed in conversation during brainstorming.

Prior to the Covid pandemic, the Mayor's Office of Disability and the Disability Council first sought the City's support and the Department of Elections provided information to DT regarding how people vote-by-mail or utilize a remote accessible voting program. However, the COIT technology funding in the FY20/21 City budget was significantly reduced to respond to the COVID emergency, and other funding sources were investigated for this important effort.

Department of Homeland Security – Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Funding

In 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) introduced a new requirement in its Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) mandating the funding of four national priority areas – one of them being Soft Targets/Crowded Places (Elections Security). The FY 2020 NOFO stated, "… given the importance of the Nation's election infrastructure, and the multiple and evolving threats to that infrastructure, at least one project within this investment must be in support of the state's efforts to enhance election security". The NOFO required the national priority area to be funded at 5% of the UASI allocation ($1.5 mi). Under the NOFO, all national priority projects are reviewed by DHS/FEMA using a list of criteria for effectiveness.

The Bay Area UASI Approval Authority oversees the UASI grant within the Bay Area geographical footprint – 14 jurisdictions and more than 100 cities (population of more than 6 million). The UASI Management Team manages the grant-funded projects and all associated fiscal reporting requirements. The City and County of San Francisco is the fiscal agent. Both the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) and San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) are voting members of the Approval Authority.

To identify the regional needs/gaps relating to elections security, the UASI Management Team consulted regional working groups; and consequently, identified the IAM project from collaborating with the subject matter expertise of DT, Department of Elections, and the Mayor's Office of Disability. The IAM project is about improving secure election access for people with disabilities by developing a secure way to make sure ballots are completed by the

intended person and that ballot is returned securely. The project was never intended to be about facilitating internet voting for the public. The project was included with the FY 20 UASI investment justifications and later approved by both the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and DHS. The IAM project was also approved by the Bay Area UASI Approval Authority at its January 2020 Brown Act meeting.

The Enhanced Election Security – AFN Remote Ballots Project

The Enhanced Election Security – Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Remote Ballots Project was an identity and access management technology project intended to test methods for ensuring the person is who they say are when accessing a voting system. This verification would be like banking access or remote work access when two (2) types of identification are needed to use the system. Typically, this is a username and password and a second factor such as a text message or unique code. The project does not include internet voting for the public or utilizing blockchain technologies to deliver and receive ballots. The difference is that one technology, identity, and access management, is about verifying a person's identity. The other technology, blockchain, is a secure data recording technology. The project was not specific to San Francisco – it is a regional project due to UASI grant requirements. As mentioned earlier, BAUASI will not move forward on this part of the project.