

General Registrar's & Electoral Board Workgroup

Minutes

The meeting was called to order on October 7, 2014, at 1:10PM by Co-Chair John Hager. Attending were electoral board (EBs) members William Bell, Renee Andrews, Bill Thomas, and Robin Lind; general registrar's (GRs) Larry Haake, Tracy Howard, and Barbara Gunter. Representing SBE was Chairman Charles E. Judd and the Department of Elections (ELECT) was represented by ELECT Policy Analyst Martha Brissette and ELECT Liaison Rose Mansfield and members of the public.

Co-Chair Hager introduced Bill Thomas; Secretary of the City of Richmond's Electoral Board and welcomed him as a member of the GREB Workgroup. Co-Chair Hager noted that Mr. Thomas's appointment was approved by SBE at a meeting previously held on this date.

Co-Chair Hager submitted the GREB Workgroup Minutes for approval from the September 4, 2014 meeting to the members. There were no additions or deletions to the Minutes and the GREB Workgroup Members unanimously approved the minutes.

The first order of business was the Registrars Report presented by Larry Haake, General Registrar; Chesterfield County. Mr. Haake stated that a survey was published to the general registrars of the commonwealth regarding the cost of elections and staffing. Mr. Haake stated that approximately 70% of the general registrars responded. The summary of the survey data was provided to GREB Workgroup Members with additional handouts provided to support the findings. Noteworthy was the number of elections per year increased across the commonwealth. Mr. Haake reported that the average cost reported, by the 81 localities that answered the survey, was \$3.5 million dollars for the general election and the average cost of a special election was \$1.1 million dollars. Mr. Haake stated that the staffing levels in the general registrar's offices are below what is needed to conduct elections due to the frequency of the elections and increased tasking. Mr. Haake reported that there is an additional survey, in the completion stage on the duties of the general registrar's. The analysis of the duties survey will be presented at the next GREB Workgroup Meeting. Mr. Haake stated that all localities in the commonwealth do not staff a full-time general registrar. Those localities that have part-time general registrars staffing their offices indirectly provide a lower level of access to the voters in their area.

Tracy Howard, General Registrar; Radford City, introduced the notion that there lacks uniformity in the tracking of election expenses across the commonwealth and that reporting is difficult. Further analysis of the data submitted by the general registrars should be reviewed and this data should be considered a sampling. Barbara Gunter, General Registrar, Bedford County, stated that different localities utilize different voting equipment and this variable accounts for the variation in election related expenses. Ms. Gunter stated that the report should sample five

47 localities each from small, medium, and large localities. SBE Chairman Judd affirmed
48 that the suggested approach would be similar to a JLARC study sampling. Robin
49 Lind, EB Secretary; Goochland County, stated that the Virginia Electoral Board
50 Association (VEBA) offered financial support to the GREB Workgroup to help gather
51 the data required and would assist in creating a working spreadsheet for the group
52 to utilize. Co-Chair Hager acknowledged that creating a sampling by size of locality
53 would provide the overview needed and presentation of data to the general
54 assembly would be easier to digest than data presented from 133 localities.

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56 The next order of business was the Electoral Board Report presented by Robin Lind,
57 Secretary; Goochland County Electoral Board. Mr. Lind presented a document that
58 encompasses the concerns of electoral board members. Mr. Lind highlighted the
59 document points;

- 60 (i) Clarify the existing codified system of GRs preparing and maintaining
61 voter registration rolls, and EBs preparing ballots, administering
62 absentee ballot provisions, conducting elections, and ascertaining results.
- 63 (ii) Full disclosure of enumeration of responsibilities and duties in
64 conduction elections.
- 65 (iii) Full disclosure and enumeration of qualifications, performance
66 requirements and skill sets for GRs and EBs across the commonwealth.
- 67 (iv) Equalization of compensation based on job requirements and
68 professional skill sets rather than population of the jurisdiction.
- 69 (v) Analysis of the increased cost of conduction elections.
- 70 (vi) Gathering of detailed data points indication the costs in each of the 133
71 jurisdictions and ELECT showing the particulars of the data gathered.
- 72 (vii) Non-Partisan Elections Leadership at the State Level.

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75 Co-Chair Hager stated that the document presented was skillfully crafted and should
76 assist in defining the goals of the GREB Workgroup. SBE Chairman Judd suggested
77 that the presentation to the general assembly members be contained to direct
78 supporting data and information related to the established goals/objectives of the
79 GREB Workgroup.

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81 Mr. Haake stated that the discussion of GRs acting as Director of Elections and EBs
82 acting as political observers is defined in the answers that the EBs provided to the
83 EB survey. Renee Andrews, EB Chair; City of Falls Church, stated that the
84 responsibilities of the GRs and EBs should be narrowed into short groupings to
85 make the definition of duties broad verses narrow. Bill Bell, Secretary; Isle of Wight,
86 stated that the study identifies two concerns (i) the code needs to be revisited that
87 covers the GRs and (ii) the definition of the current role of the GR's needs to be
88 adequately documented. SBE Chairman Judd stated that the roles of the GR's and
89 the EB's could be redefined and attached to recent legislation which would be more
90 productive than starting the process from infancy.

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92 Mr. Lind inquired if the workgroup members support changing the name of the GRs
93 to "Director of Elections & Registration"? Discussion pursued on the possible
94 definition of roles of the GR's and EB's among members of the workgroup. Co-Chair
95 Hager directed the workgroup to refer to the handout presented at the GREB
96 Workgroup Meeting on September 4, 2014, titled: "A Review of Duties and
97 Responsibilities of Electoral Boards and General Registrars" and consider how the
98 responsibilities can be shifted from one position to another. Tracy Howard, General
99 Registrar; Radford City, suggested that the example presented by the Department of
100 Elections and the State Board of Elections could be the framework for the localities
101 to follow when establishing the new definitions of the Director of Elections and the
102 electoral board members.

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104 Bill Thomas, Secretary; City of Richmond, suggested that when a policy change
105 occurs at the local level documentation pursues to support the change of duties or
106 events conducted by the general registrar or electoral board member. Mr. Lind
107 stated that localities may have different work practices in place thus having a
108 uniform set of details for both the GRs and the EBs would be beneficial to the
109 commonwealth. Ms. Andrews suggested that a list of duties be compiled and sent to
110 the EB's to place in the Minutes of their meetings. SBE Chairman Judd inquired
111 about maintaining the uniformity of duties across the commonwealth. Ms. Andrews
112 stated that different localities may function differently however: "The goal would be
113 to meet the objectives at the end so that the impact on the voter is uniform. " SBE
114 Chairman Judd stated that maintaining uniformity across the commonwealth is a
115 core value of the State Board of Elections therefore maintaining this value in the
116 definition of the responsibilities of the GRs and EB's is essential regardless of the
117 size of the locality. The purpose of this workgroup is to present our findings and
118 conclusions to the general assembly. Barbara Gunter, General Registrar; Bedford
119 County, stated that the code should reflect the duties of the general registrars and in
120 its' current standing the code is non-representative. Martha Brissette, ELECT Policy
121 Analyst, stated that these issues create the question of training the general
122 registrars so that uniformity can be established and maintained. Mr. Thomas stated
123 that he would not support any action that would limit the authority of the electoral
124 board. Mr. Haake stated that taking a responsibility of the electoral board member
125 and moving it into the responsibilities and duties of the general registrar supports
126 the electoral board members by removing duties that should be assigned to the
127 general registrar. Co-Chair Hager stated that the duties should be defined utilizing
128 the survey results. GREB Workgroup Members agreed to continue to work on the
129 definitions and goals and have presentation during the next meeting.

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131 The next order of business was the Research Request presented by Martha
132 Brissette, ELECT Policy Analyst. Ms. Brissette explained that the chart covered
133 elections from the year 1976 until 2012. The number of total registered voters was
134 compared to the number of individuals who voted. Those turnout numbers included
135 voters who voted absentee during the reported election year. Ms. Brissette
136 explained the numbers provided are also posted on the ELECT website. This

137 information would be beneficial when determining the cost of elections. Ms.
138 Brissette asked if there were any questions and there were none.

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140 The next order of business was the public comment period. Donald Palmer, SBE
141 Secretary approached the podium. Secretary Palmer stated that the Presidential
142 Commission Report looked at the same issues that the GREB Workgroup has
143 centered their focus. Secretary Palmer stated that there is concern that there is no
144 one to lobby for election officials and that the issue of professionalism in election
145 administration has not been formally addressed. Secretary Palmer stated that the
146 Bi-Partisan Policy Center would be available to provide assistance once the
147 workgroup has completed their mission and assigned goals. Co-Chair Hager thanked
148 Secretary Palmer for the offer of assistance and expressed that it is frustrating to be
149 lacking in professional assistance to compile the information and necessary reports
150 generated from the GREB Workgroup. Co-Chair Hager asked if there were any other
151 public comments and there were none.

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153 The next meeting of the GREB Workgroup is set for November 18, 2014 at 1 PM in
154 the Washington Building-Room B27, 1100 Bank Street, Richmond, Virginia.

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156 There being no further business, the Workgroup adjourned at 3:47PM.

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160 Co-Chair Jean Jensen

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166 Co-Chair John Hager