

# BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE

## VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION

Our voter registration system urgently needs reform. That system, designed for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is struggling to keep up with 21<sup>st</sup> century society and political engagement. Americans deserve a modern system that works.

### VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION WILL:

- **Upgrade** our outdated, voter-initiated, paper-based registration system, by leveraging existing technology and reliable information on other government lists to update and expand the voter rolls;
- **Save taxpayers millions of dollars** each year;
- **Increase voter registration** rates, expanding the franchise to up to **65 million eligible Americans** and preventing unwarranted voter disenfranchisement;
- Increase the **accuracy and reliability** of the voter rolls;
- **Reduce** opportunities for **fraud**; and
- **Eliminate** unnecessary **paperwork**, duplicative data entry, and last-minute registration burdens on election officials.

### VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION HAS FOUR CENTRAL FEATURES:

- **Automated Registration:** State election officials automatically register consenting eligible citizens by electronically transmitting reliable information from other government lists.
- **Portability:** Once an eligible citizen is on a state's voter rolls, she remains registered and her records move with her so long as she continues to reside in that state.
- **Safety Net:** Eligible citizens can correct errors on the voter rolls before and on Election Day.
- **Online Access:** Voters can register, check and update their registration records through a secure and accessible online portal.

### WHY VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION WORKS:

- The **building blocks** of a modernized system are already **in place**. Thanks to a 2002 federal law, every state now has (or soon will have) a computerized statewide voter registration database capable of sharing information in some form with other government databases.
- **Each component of VRM is currently being used successfully in multiple states across the country**, ranging from Arizona to Florida, Kansas to Ohio to Utah, and Maine to Washington. Also, 38 state DMVs automatically register all eligible young men for the Selective Service, as do a variety of other federal and state agencies.
- Automatic transmission of voter registrations **increases registration rates**. In Washington, the number of voter registration transactions at DMVs **doubled** after the system was automated. In South Dakota, they increased almost **eight-fold**.
- **Other major democracies** successfully modernized their voter registration systems, reducing costs and increasing registration rates. Canada, France, Germany, and Great Britain each use records from a variety of government agencies to register well over 90% of their eligible citizens.

## **VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION IS COST EFFECTIVE AND WILL SAVE MONEY:**

- Using computers for voter registration and updates is far cheaper than paper-based systems.
- **Every state** that has implemented elements of VRM has **saved money**. For example, Washington spent about \$280K to automate voter registration at DMVs and introduce online registration. The Secretary of State's office saved over \$125K in the first year, and the counties saved even more.
- Processing a paper voter registration form costs 83¢, compared to 3¢ for an online form, according to reports from Maricopa County, Arizona.
- Canada **fully recouped** the cost of its VRM system in one national election.

## **GROWING BI-PARTISAN SUPPORT FOR VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION:**

- “By linking these voter databases to other state agencies . . . the potential to reduce fraud and prevent voters from being turned away is tremendous.”  
—**Then-Senator Barack Obama** (AEI-Brookings Election Reform Project Launch, 02/08/2006)
- “Bringing our voter registration system into the 21st century must be the priority for improving the election process.”  
—**Robert Bauer, General Counsel to Obama for America and incoming White House Counsel and Trevor Potter, General Counsel to McCain 2008** (*Washington Post*, 06/24/2009)
- Voter registration modernization would “remove the single biggest barrier to voting in the United States, our antiquated registration system.”  
—**Attorney General Eric Holder** (Brennan Center Legacy Awards Dinner, 11/17/2009)
- “Democrats believe it is too hard for people to register and vote; Republicans believe it is too easy to register and vote fraudulently. There may be a way to solve both problems simultaneously through new technology and forge a better bipartisan solution.”  
—**Senator Charles Schumer** (*National Journal*, 04/13/2009)
- “One key area where improvements are necessary, and possible, is the modernization of our voter registration system.”  
—**Missouri Secretary of State Robin Carnahan (D) and Kentucky Secretary of State Trey Grayson (R)** (*Roll Call*, 03/10/2009)
- Leading papers across the country have editorialized in support of VRM—including the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Times*, *Roll Call*, *Boston Globe*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Columbus Dispatch*, *El Diario*, and *Kansas City Star*.
- **The Committee to Modernize Voter Registration** includes co-chairs Trevor Potter and Marc Elias, prominent campaign lawyers; former Senators John Danforth and Tom Daschle; former Representatives Harold Ford, Jr. and Susan Molinari; and leading election officials and experts.
- **Other leading public officials** who have called for VRM include then-Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton; former U.S. Election Assistance Commission Chair Rosemary Rodriguez; current and former Ohio Secretaries of State Jennifer Brunner and Ken Blackwell; and former DOJ Voting Section Chief John Tanner.