

*From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz*

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For Immediate Release

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## **STATE BANKS \$5M FOR ELECTION REFORMS Feds wire first HAVA installment**

Within a week after Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz requested funding being allocated to states under the federal "Help America Vote Act" (HAVA), an initial installment of \$5 million has been received from Washington and placed in a special account earmarked for election reforms.

HAVA was authored by U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd in response to the voting debacle in Florida during the 2000 presidential election. Bysiewicz, who announced the receipt of the funds at today's meeting of the 30-member bipartisan HAVA State Planning Committee, estimates that Connecticut will eventually receive up to \$33 million from a \$1.5 billion congressional appropriation.

"This is the first time in history that the federal government has made a significant financial commitment to election reform and it is important that our state maximize all federal funds available, particularly in tough budget times," said Bysiewicz. "The future integrity of our election process lies in the balance and we must seize the opportunity."

Bysiewicz applied for a total of \$6.7 million electronically via the Internet on April 29, and expects the balance to be secured within a month when the federal government completes its state allocation funding formula.

"With the federal resources being secured through the Secretary of the State's office, the public will be better served at election time," said State Representative Jim O'Rourke, House Chair of the Legislature's Elections Committee. "New voting technology combined with a statewide centralized voter registration system will provide the tools needed to better protect voters' rights and increase participation on Election Day."

HAVA specifically requires all states to update their voting systems by 2006 to meet new standards such as providing persons with disabilities the opportunity to vote privately and independently. According to the state Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, over 200,000 Connecticut citizens with disabilities may not vote.

“This is very good news for voters with disabilities,” said James McGaughey, executive director of the state Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities. “These funds will go a long way toward ensuring their rightful inclusion at the polls.”

“I want to commend Secretary Bysiewicz for securing the early release of these federal funds for Connecticut,” said State Senator Don DeFronzo, Senate Chair of the Legislature’s Elections Committee. “Our state will greatly benefit from the \$5 million, particularly for the completion of our statewide voter registry and the education and training of poll workers. This is a necessary and timely investment in our democracy.”

A proposal by Bysiewicz to try out new electronic voting systems during municipal elections on November 4, 2003 was approved by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Rowland. “In order to find the best voting system for our future, it is important to first determine which technology proves most reliable and what voters think of the various systems,” she said.

The Election Day test of new voting systems will be done at no cost to taxpayers using equipment loaned free of charge by vendors. Bysiewicz plans to conduct the test in at least three towns of various populations, utilizing different technologies in each municipality that volunteers.