

I want to thank the Campaign Finance Board for giving voters this opportunity to describe their voting experience. The main point I want to make is that under the current system, it is impossible for voters to be assured that they are casting a secret ballot and that no one is able to see their votes. By way of example I will describe the experience of my own polling place.

When I first moved to my current home, we voted at the Methodist Home for the Aged down the block. But the Methodist Home's space was too small, and our polling place was moved to the Episcopal Church. Unfortunately, this location was far away and hard for many people to get to, so our polling place was moved again, to another home for the aged. However, this space, too, was too small. Eventually a synagogue near us built a new building, and our polling place was finally moved to its large lobby – a spacious hall with lots of natural light coming through its glass walls.

Of course, these same glass walls that let the sunlight in also allow anyone walking by to see voters in the act of voting. The open side of the “privacy” booths face the outside – it would hardly be proper to place them facing inside, where they would be visible to anyone in the hall – and a sharp-eyed passer-by could possibly see how a voter is marking his or her ballot.

Because I know how difficult it was to find a site that could serve as a polling place in my neighborhood, I cannot advocate moving it yet again; but it is clear that because of the nature of the site, there is no way to arrange the booths in a way that assures privacy.

This problem is not limited to my polling place. During the primary in April I peeked into a couple of other polling places. I saw “privacy booths” with the open sides facing each other, and booths placed so closely together one voter could easily see what another voter was marking, even unintentionally. In many cases – and this was the case in my polling place as well – voters had to walk behind other voters while they were voting to get to a booth.

Once the voter leaves the booth, there is still no privacy. We have to take our ballot out of the “privacy sleeve” to put it in the scanner. The poll workers at my site have been very careful to show that they are not looking at our ballots – but you can't blame a voter who may be concerned that their vote may be seen; and if a voter needs help with the scanner, it is very hard for the poll worker not to look at the ballot.

The bottom line is that there is no way to assure a truly secret ballot unless the voting process takes place behind a curtain.

Another issue is the arrangement of the ballot, which is confusing. Especially in the General election, it was difficult to distinguish which candidates were running under which parties, because different parties appeared in the same column.

I also must admit that I do not have a great deal of confidence that the scanner read my votes accurately. While the scanner confirms that votes were cast, it does not allow voters to see which votes were recorded.

It seems to me that rather than use an unwieldy paper ballot with a multi-step process that necessitates exposing the marked ballot, it would make much more sense to use an ATM-style touch screen. The vast majority of people are by now familiar with ATMs. A touch screen could show the ballot office by office, clearly showing who is running for what and under what party. After voting for the office in question, the voter would go to the next screen and see the next office up for election. If a voter wanted, he or she could skip a screen and come back to it later. When the voter has gone through all the screens, the machine would ask him or her if he or she would like to return to any screens that were skipped. The final screen would show all the candidates the voter has selected, and ask him/her to confirm that these are the candidates he/she wishes to vote for.

I have read that touch screen voting booths do not leave a paper trail. But I see no reason why such a machine could not print a receipt listing the candidates voted for, which the voter would then seal in an envelope.

Of course, this entire process absolutely **MUST** take place behind a curtain – all, that is, except for the last step, in which the voter would take the sealed envelope and place it in a ballot box.

Such a process would assure voters that their votes are secret and will be counted accurately.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present my concerns about ballot secrecy and my suggestion for a better voting process.