



**Statement of John Noel
To the Georgia State Elections Board
March 11, 2020**

My name is John Noel, and I'm a candidate for the Georgia Public Service Commission. I live in Augusta, but my name will be on the Democratic Ballot in Clarke County on May 19, as well as in every other county, and that's why I asked to speak to the State Board of Elections today.

I'm concerned about voter suppression, election security, and ballot secrecy, which is an absolute right under the Georgia Constitution. Handmarked paper ballots fulfill this requirement (and have just fine until "modern" times). These new machines do not. When I looked at the new ballot marking devices, I saw the problem. A friend calls them "Georgia Jumbotrons" due to their size. It's great at Sanford Stadium. Not so much at a polling place. People can see what's on the screen from across the room, which means bystanders can watch how people vote. As far as I'm concerned, they're the next best thing to taking out a billboard to tell people how you voted. This may discourage people from showing up at the polls, especially in rural communities like where I grew up. Word kinda travels fast, and ya know everybody.

I understand state elections officials have been working on "fixes"—after the fact. You've left it up to local boards to somehow configure the machines in small rooms and draw the blinds and tell people to close their eyes while they wait in line.

This system is a mistake, for many reasons. These machines shouldn't have been purchased in the first place. One look at the Jumbotrons should have told you that. Unfortunately, the state ignored the advice of election security experts and put BMDs in place instead of going with the safer, more secure choice—handmarked paper ballots.

You cannot guarantee ballot secrecy with these machines, and that matters to a lot of people, including me. I understand that the system is in place. But if a local government decides that this system is impractical, then you should respect that decision and listen to the people.

Free and fair elections should be a sacred right, and ballot secrecy is a part of that. If a local board, in its wisdom, sees a mistake and refuses to walk past it, you should pay heed, not threaten to fine it thousands of dollars. Thank you.