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Memorandum

To: Linda Lamone, Ross Goldstein, and Nikki Trella, Maryland State Board of Elections

From: Paul Herrnson and Michael Hanmer, Center for American Politics and Citizenship

Date: 2/15/11

Re: Report on Survey Results Among Users of the Electronic Absentee Ballot Delivery System

Beginning with the 2010 primary election, the State of Maryland offered its voters the option of receiving their official blank absentee ballot, accompanying documentation, and pre-addressed mailing label via a secure website. This new voting option, known as the Electronic Absentee Ballot Delivery System (EABDS), was developed by the Maryland State Board of Elections (MSBE) and the Center for American Politics and Citizenship (CAPC). As part of its evaluation process, CAPC conducted several surveys to examine the new system. This memo summarizes the results from CAPC's survey of citizens who used the new system. We define users as all registered voters who were recorded as having requested a ballot through EABDS. Overall, users reported a high level of satisfaction, confidence in the system, and a great deal of interest in using the system again in future elections.

The population for the survey of EABDS users consists of all those who requested to receive a blank absentee ballot for the 2010 general election. The population consisted of 9,179 individuals. Each of these 9,179 individuals was sent an email after the November 2010 general election inviting them to participate in a survey about their experiences with EABDS; 169 of these emails bounced back as undeliverable. Those who did not respond were sent up to 5 additional email reminders. A total of 4,319 individuals took the survey, yielding a response rate of about 48%.

After a voter requests a blank electronically delivered absentee ballot, he/she is sent an email with instructions on how to access the ballot. This step represents the first possible stumbling block for users. Roughly 93% of EABDS users reported receiving an email instructing them on the next steps. Although short of perfect, the 7% who reported that they did not receive an email with instructions represent some who might have received the email but do not recall this step. This is consistent with research showing that individuals sometimes have difficulty reporting on past behavior. We see some evidence of memory failure in that just over 60% of those who reported that they did not receive the instructions later reported that they voted and returned the electronically delivered absentee ballot. A check against the voter file shows that these individuals did indeed return their EABDS ballot, indicating that most of those who said they did not get the email with instructions simply did not remember this step in the process. When these individuals – who we know forgot about this step but did return the ballot -- are accounted for, the estimate of the percentage who did not get the instructions drops to 3%. Moreover, it is also

possible that some individuals received the email but did not notice it in their in-box or did not get the message because it did not make it through their spam filters.

The return rate of electronically delivered blank absentee ballots was high — almost 90%. Among the 10% of users who did not return their electronically delivered blank absentee ballot, just over half (52.3%) of them reported having voted via some other method.

The 10% of users who did not return their electronically delivered blank absentee ballot cited a variety of reasons for not doing so (see Table 1). The top 6 most widely cited reasons, accounting for 70% of the responses, were: 1) not receiving an email with instructions (23%); 2) voted in person (17%); 3) did not vote (decided not to or forgot) (9%); 4) inability to print the ballot or envelope (8%); 5) concerned the ballot would not arrive in time to be counted (7%); and 6) not able to download the ballot (7%).

Table 1. Primary Reason for Not Voting and Returning the Electronically Delivered Blank Absentee Ballot

Reason Given	Number of Respondents	%
Did not receive an email with instructions	99	23
Decided to vote in person	72	17
Did not vote (decided not to (5.2%) + forgot (3.8%))	38	9
Not able to print the ballot (5%) or envelope (3%)	32	8
Concerned that the ballot would not arrive in time to be counted	30	7
Not able to download the ballot	29	7
Found the instructions confusing	8	2
Not able to open the email with instructions	6	1
Did not have enough postage	5	1
Made a mistake on the ballot and was not sure how to correct it	3	1
Concerned that the website was not secure	1	0.2
Other	103	24
Total	426	100.0

Those who tried to access their electronically delivered absentee ballot found the process to be easy. This was true with respect to gaining access to the ballot on the website, where over 96% said it was very easy or fairly easy (see Figure 1), printing the ballot, where nearly 97% said it was

very easy or fairly easy (Figure 2), and printing the envelope, where 73% said it was very easy or fairly easy (Figure 3). Though the vast majority of those who tried to print the envelope found it easy, roughly 47% of users did not try to print their envelope.

Figure 1. How Easy Was it to Access Your Electronically Delivered Blank Absentee Ballot?

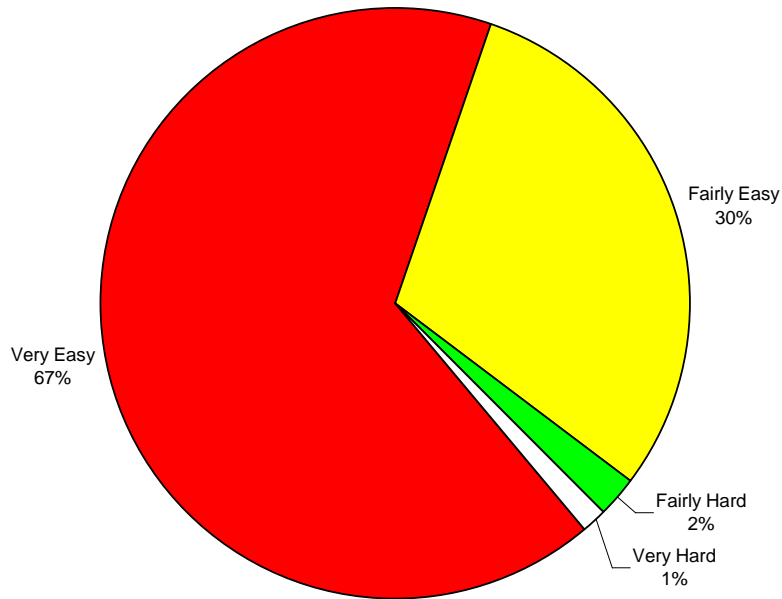


Figure 2. How Easy Was it to Print Your Electronically Delivered Blank Absentee Ballot?

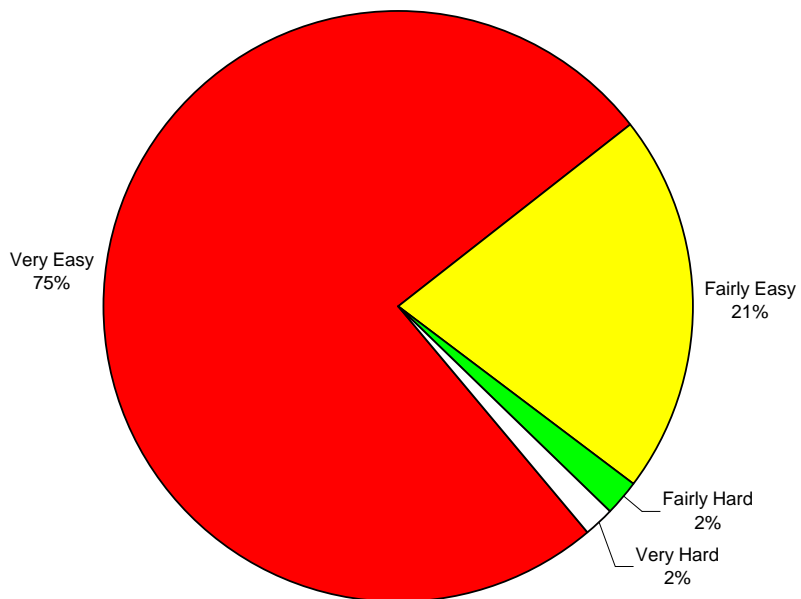
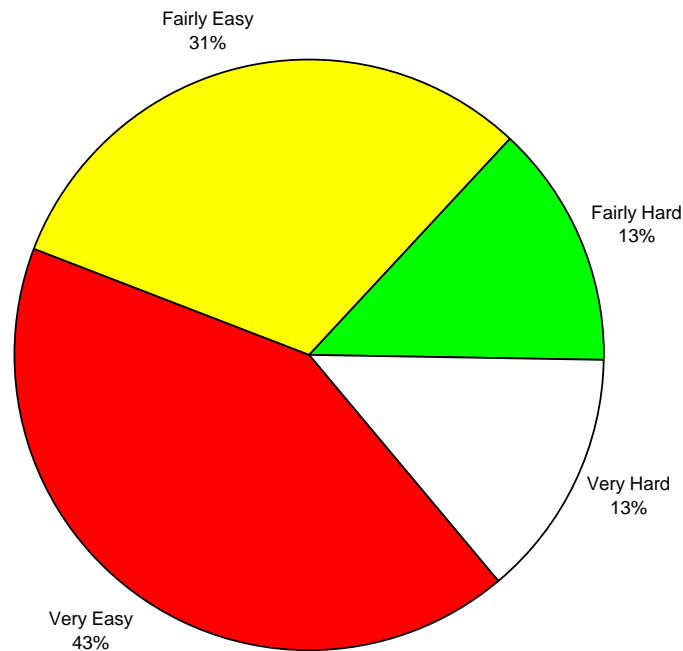


Figure 3. How Easy Was it to Print Your Envelope?



In terms of evaluating the process in its entirety, EABDS users found it easy and were unlikely to feel the need for help. When asked how easy it was to follow all of the instructions necessary to vote and return their absentee ballot, 96% of users said it was easy, with 62% saying it was very easy and 34% saying it was fairly easy. And when asked if they felt they needed help with the instructions, 95% said no. However, among the small portion of users who did feel the need for help, 41% reported that they were not able to get the help they needed.

EABDS users not only found the new voting method to be easy, they were highly satisfied and confident that their vote was counted as intended. In terms of satisfaction, 93% of users said they were at least somewhat satisfied with receiving their ballot through EABDS, with 80% saying they were very satisfied, 13% saying they were somewhat satisfied, and only 4% expressing any dissatisfaction (Figure 4). These results compare favorably to the satisfaction levels of overseas and military respondents who are registered in states across the country, who answered a similar question in a survey sponsored by the Overseas Vote Foundation; in the Overseas Vote Foundation survey, 86% of respondents said they were at least satisfied with the balloting aspect of their voting experience, with 48% saying they were very satisfied.¹ About 90% of all EABDS users were at least somewhat confident that their ballot was counted as intended. Nearly 50% reported that they were very confident that their ballot was counted as intended and another 40% said they were somewhat confident (Figure 5).

¹ Overseas Vote Foundation. 2010. *Moving Forward: 2010 OVF Post Election UOCAVA Survey Report and Analysis*.

Figure 4. How Satisfied Were You with Receiving Your Ballot Through EABDS?

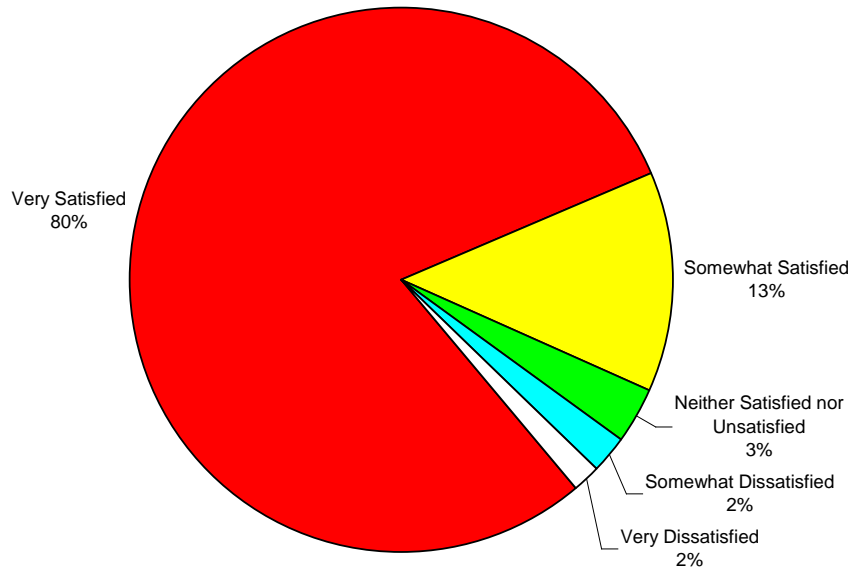
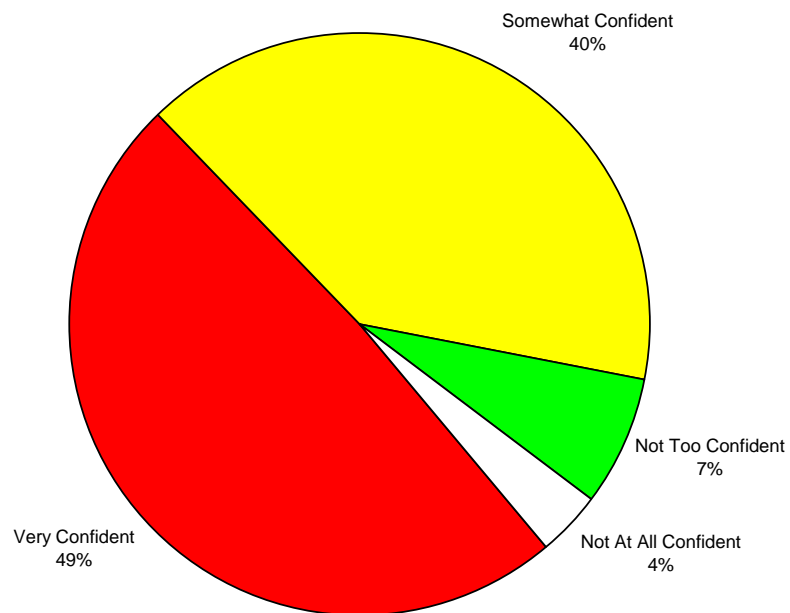


Figure 5. How Confident Are You that Your Ballot Was Counted as Intended?



When asked to compare the convenience of EABDS to other methods of voting, the vast majority of users agreed (62% strongly agreed and 20% somewhat agreed) that EABDS was more convenient (Figure 6). Moreover, only a handful of users rated the security of blank absentee ballots delivered through EABDS as less secure than blank ballots delivered through regular mail. Specifically, 51% believed the two approaches were on par in terms of security, 42% indicated EABDS was more secure, and 6% believed EABDS was less secure (Figure 7).

Figure 6. How Much Do You Agree Or Disagree With The Following: Voting With A Ballot Delivered Through EABDS Was More Convenient Than Other Methods Of Voting.

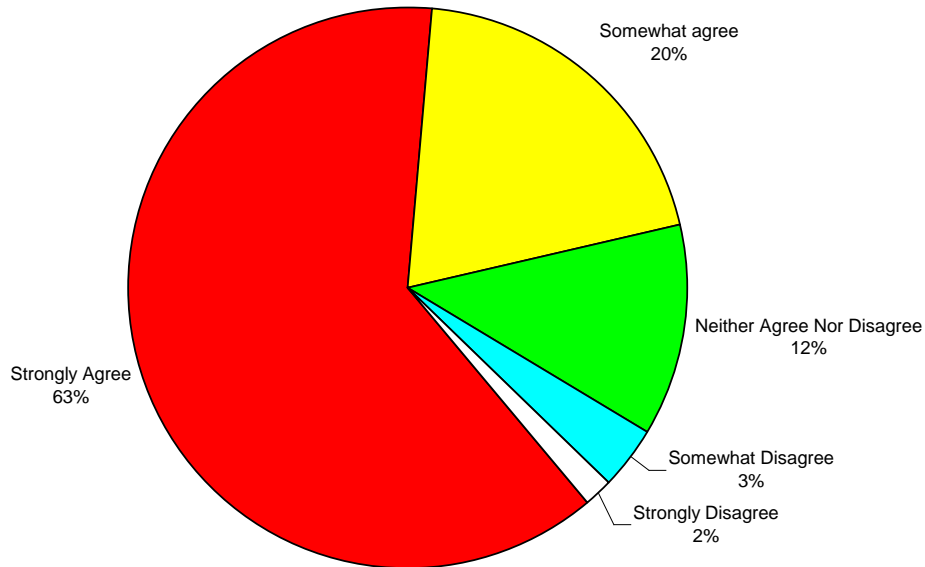
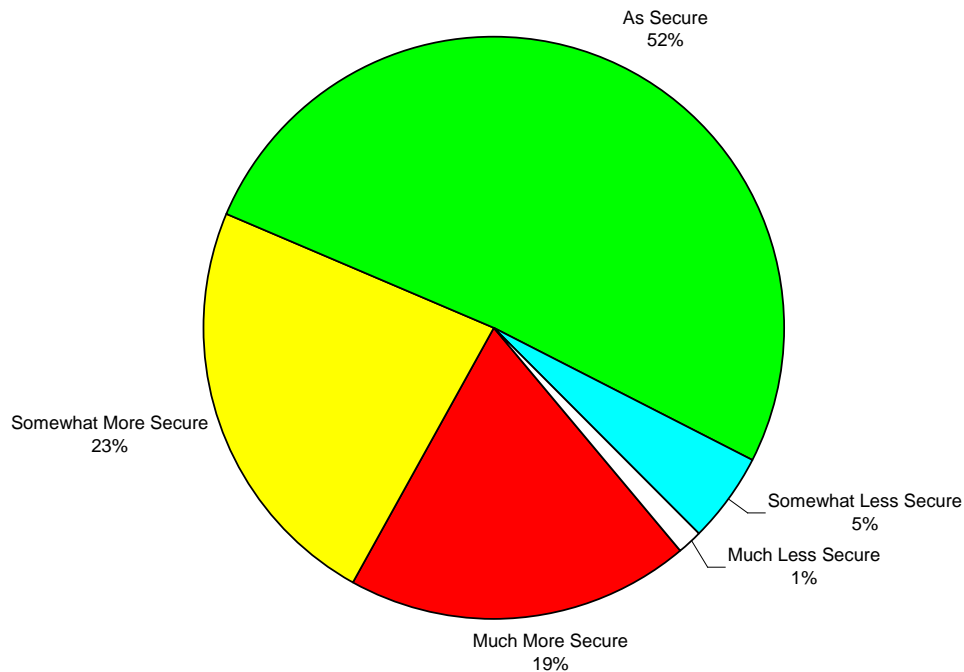


Figure 7. Security Of EABDS Ballot Compared To Absentee Ballot Delivered Through Regular Mail. The EABDS Ballot Is:



Looking to the future, nearly 91% of EABDS users said they were likely to use EABDS in future elections and 92% said they would recommend the system to others. Surely these results reflect the high level of satisfaction with, and confidence in, a system that users found easy and convenient.

In conclusion, we describe the demographic characteristics of the users who responded to the survey. The largest group of respondents was in their 60s, followed closely by those in their 50s and those in their 20s (Figure 8 left panel). By way of comparison, among all active registrants in Maryland those in their 50s are the largest group followed by those in their 20s and 30s (Figure 8, right panel). Also noteworthy is that those in their 60s as well as those under age 20 make up a much larger percentage of EABDS users than they do active registrants. Both military and overseas voters were also more prominent among EABDS users than they are among active registrants; though each group makes up 0.1% of active registrants, 2.4% of EABDS users were in the military and 6.5% of EABDS users were overseas civilians.

Figure 8. Age Distribution of EABDS Users and Active Registrants

