

## **Paper Ballot Voting in Alexandria – An Act of Necessity**

In June of 2009, the Alexandria City Council voted to move local elections from May to November but did not reach an agreement on other changes, such as staggered terms or extending terms to four years (so elections could be timed to occur in odd-number years rather than federal-election years).

The impact on 2012? Alexandria will be transformed from a short-ballot (heavy-turnout) jurisdiction to a long-ballot (heavy-turnout) jurisdiction. In November, 2008 Alexandrians cast votes in only three races; this November Alexandrians will cast votes for up to 13 candidates plus two constitutional amendments.

- On Presidential Election Day 2008, Alexandria voters marked the short ballot and averaged one minute in the voting booth and, at peak hours, waited up to two hours in line.
- On Presidential Election Day 2012, Alexandria Election Officials projected that voting the long ballot using the current electronic voting equipment would result in voters taking more than twice as long to vote. Lines would be proportionately longer as well.

See where this is going? The Alexandria Electoral Board did, and realized they needed to greatly expand capacity to move voters through the process, otherwise voters would face the long waits that create national headlines (See Cuyahoga County, Ohio 2004, among others.).

Adding more electronic voting machines was outlawed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2007 leaving the Board only one choice – paper ballots marked in privacy booths (or behind privacy screens) and fed into scanners that read the ballots and tally results. This November the Board will deploy 20 or more inexpensive privacy screens to each precinct rather than the 8 to 12 eSlate booths used in 2008, so wait times this November will be comparable (or shorter) than wait times in November of 2008.

The Electoral Board's move to paper ballots was an act of necessity. It will accommodate the longer ballot far more efficiently than the current system and greatly reduce wait times for voters.