

STATEMENT OF
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FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

HEARING ON
SAFEGUARDING ELECTIONS FOR OUR NATION'S TROOPS
THROUGH REFORMS AND IMPROVEMENTS ACT (SENTRI - S. 1728)

January 29, 2014

Chairman Schumer, Ranking Member Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Defense Department's view on the Safeguarding Elections for our Nation's Troops through Reforms and Improvements Act, also known as SENTRI.

The Department is always striving to advance the tools and resources needed for our Service members, their families and overseas citizens to vote absentee successfully from anywhere in the world. In 2013, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and the Department advanced three major initiatives by creating a robust information portal, implementing greater voter assistance capabilities, and commencing work to increase the efficiency of mail delivery with the establishment of the Military Postal Automated Redirection System (Military PARS).

FVAP has optimized its website, FVAP.gov, by reorganizing content to better suit users, deploying key portions of the site to track performance metrics for our Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs), and beginning to update online training for release in spring 2014. The information-rich portal was designed and implemented to allow for: a dynamically generated Voting Assistance Guide for Unit VAOs to use in the field; standardized metrics across the Services; and dedicated content for voters on how to navigate the absentee voting regulations for each State.

FVAP is always looking for ways to improve its voter assistance capabilities. In 2013, FVAP created a suite of materials for use by VAOs, election officials and other stakeholders. These materials provide absentee voter specific information on such things as completing the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB), and laws surrounding absentee voting, to ensure all parties are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to do so. Simultaneously, FVAP has updated online training for VAOs and election officials to ensure awareness of their role and that they are prepared to assist Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters.

We realize the cycle time to request and return an absentee ballot may serve as a hindrance to voting absentee successfully. The Department, with the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) as the lead agency, is coordinating with the Department of State and the United States Postal Service (USPS) to modernize military mail delivery. Military PARS will redirect undeliverable-as-addressed election materials to military and diplomatic addresses in the same manner as civilian mail. This will occur at the first processing point stateside — rather than at a distant, overseas processing center. Military PARS is on track for the scheduled completion date in October 2014, and will be fully established in preparation for the 2016 election cycle.

We are also working closely with State and local election officials to ensure they understand the requirements of UOCAVA by offering online and in-person training. During 2013, the Department awarded research grants to examine improvements to the election process for military and overseas voters by providing assistance to develop online blank ballot delivery tools and to establish a single point of contact in State election offices. The concept of the single point of contact was recommended by Congress in the Help America Vote Act. Since 2002, that recommendation has been adopted by one state only, Maine. Thanks to the Department's research grants, Arizona and Maryland will implement a single address statewide for UOCAVA voters this year, and we look forward to the findings at the conclusion of our grant program.

These activities illustrate the continuous work at FVAP, and the proposals in the SENTRI bill embrace the notion of change and offer some real benefits to UOCAVA voters. The

remainder of this statement focuses on the Department's position on how SENTRI, as written, would affect these Uniformed Service members.

Title I: Amendments Related to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act

The amendments to UOCAVA in Title I include many of the proposed changes that the Administration has submitted to Congress, most recently as part of the Department's 2014 National Defense Authorization Act submission.¹ Those proposals, submitted in coordination with the Department of Justice, would greatly benefit military and overseas voters, and we continue to support enactment of these changes.

Title II: Provision of Voter Assistance to Members of the Armed Forces

The Department agrees with the intent of Title II of the SENTRI Bill; however, we would like to work with the Committee to clarify some of the technical requirements to make certain we are successful in meeting the intent of the Bill.

Section 201 (a)(1) amendments to 10 U.S.C. Sec. 1566b (a)(2)(C)(ii)(II) requires electronic transmission of a completed FPCA by the Department to "the appropriate State or local election officials." While this can be completed, the Department is wary of its usefulness and unintended consequences based on the proposed language in regard to the electronic transmission of the completed FPCA.

Almost every State requires a physical, hand-written signature on the FPCA, and the automated nature of the process described in this section does not appear to anticipate the need for a voter to print and scan the completed form to return it electronically. States are responsible for establishing acceptable requirements for return of the FPCA, and thus each State may have slightly different rules. For example, if the voter sends an electronic copy, digitally signed using his or her Common Access Card (CAC), to a State that requires a hardcopy, physical signature the ballot request may be rejected. States frequently use the hardcopy signatures to ensure the voter's identity by comparing the signatures on the FPCA and the voted ballot. Replacing a hardcopy signature with an electronic signature removes this checkpoint. Additionally, information acquired when using the user's CAC to pull address information from internal Department systems may not reflect the address used for voting purposes by the Service member.

Removing the requirement above for electronic transmission of the completed FPCA would remedy the Department's issue with this section. Should the committee remove this electronic transmission requirement, the costs associated with prepopulating forms to assist voters would be relatively low and would recognize the role of the States to field their own systems and offer electronic voter registration.

Title II of the SENTRI Bill also requires the development of an integrated alert for members of the military to receive assistance with updating their address information any time they submit an address change to the Department's personnel systems. FVAP is currently developing just such a tool to offer the very same level of service to Service members each time they process an address-changing event online. Each time a voter initiates an address change within this system, known as milConnect, the system will provide reminder information and a

¹ For reference, see *Third Package of Legislative Proposals Sent to Congress for Inclusion in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (Sent to Congress on May 15, 2013)*, "UOCAVA Amendments.pdf," available at <http://www.dod.mil/dodgc/olc/legispro14.html>

link for submitting a new Federal Post Card Application with their local election official. This update is on track for its scheduled completion in summer 2014.

Title III: Electronic Voting Systems

Title III of the SENTRI bill removes the existing requirement for FVAP to conduct an electronic voting demonstration project, often referred to as the internet voting project. At this time, the Department raises no objection to the repeal of this project as State election officials are ultimately responsible for the security of elections.

Conclusion

Chairman Schumer, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share the Department's view on the SENTRI Act. FVAP, and the Department, look forward to continuing to provide the best possible assistance to our Service members, their families and overseas citizens. I look forward to your questions.



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Mr. Matt Boehmer is the Director of the Federal Voting Assistance Program. He served as the Acting Director of FVAP from January 14, 2013, until his selection as permanent Director in November 2013. FVAP is a component of the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA). In his capacity as the Director, Mr. Boehmer administers the Federal responsibilities of the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* for the Secretary of Defense, who is the Presidential designee. The Act covers the voting rights of Uniformed Services personnel, their eligible family members and all U.S. citizens residing outside the United States.



Mr. Boehmer brings more than 10 years of experience in program and fiscal management, as well as, marketing communications and outreach from his tenure as the Director of the Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) office. JAMRS enables DoD Leadership and the Services to make informed research-based recruiting decisions eliminate unnecessary redundancies across the recruiting communities and conduct focused outreach efforts that are distinct from, yet integral to, those of the Services in order to preserve and enhance the All-Volunteer Force.

Mr. Boehmer began working for the Federal government in December 1991, when he joined the Department's Outstanding Scholarship Program after receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from The University of Mary Washington. He has spent his 21-year career working for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, initially at the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and currently at the DHRA.

Mr. Boehmer graduated from the 1999 Executive Leadership Development Program, received the Joint Meritorious Unit Award in 1999, and in 2007 received the Medal for Exceptional Civilian Service from the Office of Secretary of Defense.