|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Commissioners Office** ***County of Carlton*** Carlton County Courthouse P.O. Box 130 Carlton, MN 55718-0130 **Telephone (218) 384-9127** **Facsimile (218) 384-9116** | **FIRST DISTRICT** **Dick Brenner, Cloquet****SECOND DISTRICT** **Marv Bodie, Esko****THIRD DISTRICT** **Thomas Proulx, Cloquet****FOURTH DISTRICT** **Susan Zmyslony, Moose Lake****FIFTH DISTRICT**  **Gary Peterson, Barnum** |



Honorable Representative Sarah Anderson

Chair, House Government Finance Committee

Re: HF1697 O’Driscoll Voting Equipment Grant Program

Madam Chair and Honorable Representatives:

On behalf of the Carlton County Board of Commissioners I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee regarding HF1697, establishing a grant program to provide funding for the acquisition/replacement/betterment of election related equipment.

In 2006, Carlton County (on behalf of all the local jurisdictions within the County) was fortunate to receive almost $400,000 from the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Grant Program. These grant proceeds were used to acquire over $500,000 in election related equipment - assistive voting devices and tabulators - for all forty election precincts within the County. As you are aware, the age of the existing equipment, and technological advancements in new equipment, is necessitating that we consider the replacement of the older obsolete equipment.

For the past five budget cycles, Carlton County has attempted to include at least some funding to be used towards the acquisition and replacement of election related equipment, including, but not limited to tabulators, assistive voting devices, and electronic poll books. Carlton County administers the elections on behalf of all the jurisdictions within the County – cities, townships, schools, etc. – without charging back to those jurisdictions. As you can imagine, during any budget discussion, when it comes to balancing the budget, and keeping levies in check, the easiest (lowest) fruit is the first to be picked; or in the case of election equipment, trimmed from the budget.

Carlton County knows and understands the need to replace the existing equipment, but, unfortunately, roads and bridges, public safety, and the health and welfare of the citizenry takes priority. The anticipated cost of replacing/upgrading the existing equipment is well over $500,000, over two percent of the current levy. As Auditor/Treasurer/Elections Administrator for Carlton County, I do anticipate that I will continue to pressure the board for election equipment replacement funding, but given the current financial constraints, I do not anticipate the project proceeding without access to funding as could be provided with this legislation.

Respectfully,

Paul G. Gassert

Carlton County

Auditor/Treasurer