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AUDITOR GENERAL

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Auditor General DePasquale to Probe Philadelphia's Selection of New Voting Machines

PHILADELPHIA – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today announced his probe into county purchasing of new voting systems will include a review of Philadelphia's procurement process, which is moving into its next phase this week.

"Because Philadelphia is such a huge county, this may be one of the bigger election contracts in the United States," DePasquale said. "Whoever wins it, it's a big deal for that company."

In November, the city issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to replace its voting system. The submission deadline was Dec. 28, 2018. The process was put on a fast track so that the city could have new equipment in place well ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

"I have many questions: Did anyone in Philadelphia city government fully vet the Request for Proposals process to make sure that security concerns and accessibility for voters with disabilities were given strong enough consideration? Who wrote the request? Did anyone meet with a lobbyist? Did anyone get taken to dinner? Did anyone receive a donation or trip?"

"It would appear the Request for Proposals was written to favor one vendor," DePasquale added. "I understand the need to move quickly, but I don't think there was a full accounting of the process. It's up to Philadelphia to decide how to proceed, but I'm going to pursue answers to these questions."

In December, DePasquale announced that he would review purchasing of voting systems by counties after it was reported that Luzerne County's elections director accepted trips from a vendor that was selected to provide voting equipment. Philadelphia is one of nine counties that did not respond to DePasquale's request for information by the Feb. 8 deadline.

"If vendors lobbied Luzerne County, does anyone think they wouldn't lobby Philadelphia, too?" DePasquale said.

In April 2018, the Pennsylvania Department of State told counties they have until the end of 2019 to select new voting systems that feature a paper record, which allows for more accurate post-election audits. The new systems are to be in use no later than the 2020 primary, and preferably by the November 2019 general election. Counties may choose from among any of the voting systems that are certified by both the federal and state governments.

DePasquale is also auditing the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors within the Department of State. He launched that review after the Department of Homeland Security said Pennsylvania was one of 21 states targeted for hacking by Russian government operatives ahead of the 2016 election.

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