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Boone bolsters voting machine privacy

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BOONE COUNTY - The Boone County Fiscal Court has voted to purchase 121 privacy booths for the new optical scan E-scan voting machines.



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The Boone County Board of Elections requested the purchase in response to privacy concerns from voters in the May 18 primary election, which was the first time the new voting machines were used.

"By far, the most consistent concern that we have heard has been in regards to ballot privacy," Jonathan Brown of the board of elections said in a letter to the fiscal court. "To alleviate these concerns we would like to purchase standing voting privacy booths."

In May, voters filled in paper ballots at a common table protected by a privacy screen

on three sides. Brown said the screens were adequate for most voters, but some expressed concerns that people walking by could look over their shoulders and possibly see the ballot.

"We did hear from some folks during the process I think that the partitions or the privacy booths might be helpful," Judge-executive Gary Moore said. "In the old days, the voting machines had curtains on them, so it's kind of in keeping with that philosophy."

The four-legged booths are 5 feet high from the floor to the top of the 20-inch privacy shield and weigh 12 pounds each.

The purchase will allow the board of elections to supply each polling location with two booths. The smaller table-top privacy screens will also still be available for voters who are comfortable using them.

The total cost of the booths, including shipping is \$10,535.

The voting booths were not included in the recently approved county budget, but County Administrator Jeff Earlywine said the E-scan voting machines are more cost-efficient and might provide adequate savings to cover the purchase. The new machines, he explained, are lighter, easier to transport, smaller and easier to store.

"With the new machines there is a noticeable reduction in preparation costs, Earlywine said. "With what we have seen from the first election using the new voting machines, we believe it will generate enough savings that they will pay for and fully underwrite the additional \$10,500 costs."

Brown said in the letter that the use of the new machines in the May primary resulted in savings of more than \$11,600.

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Moore and Commissioner Charlie Kenner voted in favor of the purchase and Commissioner Cathy Flaig voted against it. Commissioner Terri Moore was not at the meeting.

The booths will be purchased from Nastech, a Florida-based company that was the lowest bidder among the three companies that participated in the process. They will be delivered in time to be used in the Nov. 2 general election.

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