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FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
Department of Defense
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14th Floor, Suite 14003
Arlington, VA 22209-2162

March 22, 2011

Ms. Elaine Manlove
Commissioner of Elections
111 S. West Street, Suite 10
Dover, DE 19904

Dear Commissioner Manlove,

Thank you for the work you and your State have done to support Delaware's military and overseas voters through the Legislative Initiatives recommended by the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP). Election officials nationwide have gone to great lengths to comply with the recently enacted Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009 (MOVE Act), and our previous Legislative Initiative letters were sent before that law was enacted. We believe this letter captures your State's post-MOVE Act changes as we previously coordinated with your office. Information available to FVAP indicates that there are 3,108 Uniformed Service members and 2,747 spouses and dependents who claim Delaware as their voting residence. Additionally, FVAP estimates there are anywhere from two to four million American citizens residing overseas who claim residency in one of the 55 covered States or Territories, and therefore a portion likely reside in your State.

Despite the improvements in military and overseas voting success brought about by the MOVE Act and State initiatives, preliminary post-2010 election data appears to confirm what we learned after the 2008 election: military and overseas voters still face greater difficulties in successfully casting a ballot than does the general population, and timely delivery and return of ballots appears to be the leading cause of that failure.

From 2008 through 2010, FVAP joined the National Association of Secretaries of State, the National Association of State Election Directors, and many other military and overseas voting stakeholders in advising the Uniform Law Commission's drafting committee on the Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act (UMOVA). In addition to addressing many specific hurdles identified in previous legislative initiative letters FVAP has sent Delaware, UMOVA addresses one of the overriding concerns of military and overseas voters: the confusing and complex national patchwork of laws and regulations governing absentee voting. After a September 2008 visit to military bases in the Middle East, Asia and Europe, a delegation of six State Chief Election Officials stated that the sheer variety of State and local laws imposed on military and overseas voters is of its own right an impediment to their voting, because of the complexity it introduces for the voters and Voting Assistance Officers charged with helping them.

UMOVA's goal is to simplify the myriad absentee voting regulations and procedures into a uniform process common to all 55 States and territories. It also seeks to extend the MOVE Act provisions to State and local elections, ensuring that service people and citizens overseas have

the same rights to participate in electing State and local officials as they have for federal officials. FVAP strongly encourages Delaware to adopt UMOVA.

Given that the MOVE Act requires States send ballots to voters at least 45 days before the election and to send them electronically as well as by postal mail, FVAP recommends the expanded use of email and online transmission for all election materials throughout the entire absentee voting process, thereby supplementing fax and postal mail where possible.

FVAP will continue to encourage and assist Uniformed Service and overseas voters to increase the use of the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB). Given the inherent delays in sending ballots by mail, the FWAB represents the only ballot readily available for many of these voters. Therefore, FVAP recommends that States expand the use of the FWAB to include simultaneous registration, ballot request, and voted absentee ballot for federal, State and local offices for the elections required by the MOVE Act: general, primary, special, and runoff.

Other initiatives remain crucial to alleviating the problems faced by citizens covered by the UOCAVA, including the elimination of witnessing requirements (notary can no longer be required after passage of the MOVE Act), the authorization for the State Chief Election Official to implement emergency measures, the establishment of late registration procedures, and the enfranchisement of U.S. citizens who have never resided in the United States.

After reviewing Delaware's existing election code and procedures, we identified one Initiative for your legislature to consider during this year's legislative session. These Initiatives are discussed in detail with suggested wording in the enclosed Legislative Initiatives document. Please do not hesitate to contact us for assistance. We would be happy to provide written or in-person testimony to clarify our position on any or all of these initiatives.

Sincerely,

Digitally signed by CAREY.ROBERT.HARRISON.JR.1098129452
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Date: 2011.03.21 12:31:23 -04'00'

Bob Carey
Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program

Enclosure:
2011 Legislative Initiatives and Sample Language

CC: The Honorable Robert Gilligan
The Honorable Anthony Deluca

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FVAP
2011 Legislative Initiatives

Adoption of Recommendations of the Uniform Law Commission

The Uniform Law Commission (ULC) has presented the *"Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act" (UMOVA)* for adoption by the States. FVAP supports the Commission in this endeavor, and recommends that the States adopt the *Act*. The sheer diversity of individual election laws regarding Uniformed Services and overseas voters is, in and of itself, a serious hindrance to these voters successfully exercising their franchise. Uniformity and standardization of voting laws for the Uniformed Services and overseas voters would substantially ease the burden of compliance, improve voter success, and would help reduce the variation in terms and procedures between States.

Some States currently have statutory provisions that go beyond the recommendations of the *UMOVA*, providing greater opportunities for military and overseas voters. While FVAP encourages adoption of the *UMOVA* language for uniformity, care must be taken to avoid regressing by adopting legislation that is less than what is already provided by State law. FVAP stands ready to assist States in legislative drafting to optimize both voter opportunity and standardization. Further information on *UMOVA* is available at www.umova.org.