



## 1. Modernize Election Management System/Election Night Reporting

*Description of issue and how recommending the agency's request furthers the agency's mandates:* The AZSOS's current Election Management System/Election Night Reporting (EMS/ENR), developed solely by in-house staff over a decade ago, is outdated and overly complex. With key personnel turnover and retirements, the EMS/ENR is now maintained by a single IT staff member - the only one who has the necessary expertise and has since retired and is working as a highly paid contractor - leaving the system vulnerable to non-malicious malfunction. If this individual is unavailable, AZSOS would be forced to manually compile election results, threatening the timeliness of our reporting. Recent errors during the 2024 primary election further highlight the system's inadequacies. For instance, an outdated EMS/ENR failed to recognize critical distinctions in rules for write-in candidates, leading to incorrect results for seven Green Party races, including the U.S. Senate primary. These errors were exacerbated by overworked staff and an aging system unable to adapt to changes in Arizona's election laws.

Our office caught and corrected these mistakes, but the incident illustrates the dire need for modernized systems to ensure that elections in one of the nation's fastest-growing states are both secure and accurate. With increased complexities and the growing demands on election officials, we must secure funding to overhaul our EMS/ENR. Failure to do so risks future errors, undermining public confidence in our electoral process and potentially delaying election results at a critical time for democracy.

*Proposal:* Appropriate \$3 million from the state general fund in FY2026 and \$750,000 thereafter to modernize and operate a new EMS/ENR.

*Alternatives considered and reasons for rejection:* The alternative of continuing with the current aging system is no longer viable. As demonstrated by the errors in the primary election, the current EMS/ENR lacks the ability to accurately process nuanced election rules, particularly for new parties. The severely limited number of staff who can operate the system combined with this outdated technology creates significant risks of operational breakdowns and human error.

*Impact of not funding this fiscal year:* Without timely funding, the state risks losing its relatively automated EMS/ENR, forcing AZSOS to rely on manual compilation of election results, which would involve using Excel or other enterprise solutions with no automation or permanent support. This would significantly slow the reporting process and increase the risk of potential errors, further undermining trust in the electoral process at a time when election integrity is under intense scrutiny.

*Statutory reference:* N/A

*Equipment to be purchased:* N/A

*Classification of new positions:* N/A

*Annualization:* \$750,000