

Election officials reject advocacy groups' call for paper ballots

[Mary Kate McGowan](#) Mar 15, 2017 [Comments](#)

Georgia and Cobb election officials are rejecting calls from advocacy groups for voters to use paper ballots while the FBI investigates a data breach at Kennesaw State University.

Voters will continue to use electronic voting machines during upcoming elections, said Candice Broce, spokesperson for Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp. The use of paper ballots is reserved as a backup system in case there is a problem with the voting machines, she said.

Cobb voters will also use the voting machines in next week's special elections for the 1 percent special purpose local option sales tax for education and the vacant Marietta school board Ward 6 seat, said Janine Eveler, director of Cobb elections.

Earlier this month, KSU announced a federal investigation at the Center for Elections Systems located on the Kennesaw campus to determine if there was a data breach that might have affected the center's records, according to Tammy DeMel, spokesperson for the university.

Tuesday, the watchdog group Common Cause called on Georgia election officials to use paper ballots to ensure the integrity of next month's congressional special election on April 18. That election is to fill Georgia's Sixth District congressional seat left vacant after Tom Price was confirmed as the Health and Human Services secretary.

The advocacy group claims the cyberattack might have infected the electronic voting machines with a virus that could manipulate vote totals, so voters need to use paper ballots.

Jason Shepherd, chairman of the Cobb County Republican Party, said he is in favor of paper ballots even though he believes that Georgia's electronic voting machines are secure.

He said he prefers paper ballots because they leave a paper trail of evidence to show how voters cast their ballots.

"There's no system that is foolproof," he said. "I do feel more comfortable with the paper ballot."

Another group, Verified Voting, a California advocacy organization, is also calling for voters to use paper ballots during the congressional special election.

The use of paper ballots requires officials to manually count voters' ballots, which ensures votes are counted correctly, said Barbara Simons, chairperson of the Verified Voting's board.

"We are not going to do that," Broce said.

DeMel, Broce, the FBI and the U.S. District Attorney's office declined to comment on the status of the investigation.

The Center for Election Systems is responsible for ensuring the integrity of Georgia's voting systems through training, research, auditing and testing, according to the center's website. The center is not connected to Georgia's database of registered voters maintained by Kemp's office.

Georgia voters have been using electronic machines since 2002.
The Associated Press contributed to this report.