

Comments of Michael Fletcher to the Montgomery County BOE, April 17, 2023.

In response to a recent public information request, the SBE noted that an Albert sensor is installed at SBEs data center but not at each local BOE. Below are my comments on Albert Sensors. I hope you will share my concern that the risks associated with the use of Albert Sensors outweigh the benefits.

First, the information provided to Albert cannot be guaranteed secure. The information gathered by Albert Sensors is channeled to a private company in New York, the Center for Internet Security (CIS). The DHS selected CIS to monitor data from across the country. The types of information that CIS gathers include asset information on county hardware, software, security settings, images of election servers, and user identity and access management information, such as, user accounts, privileges, credentials, and the login authentication. In 2019, CIS said the amount of data they accumulated had become so large, that they moved it to the Amazon (AWS) cloud service. Data for Maryland and Montgomery County is now stored with at least two private corporations, CIS and Amazon.

Second, Albert fails to perform its primary goal of cybersecurity. Although being sold as a cybersecurity enhancement to prevent hacking, such as, Russian election interference, Albert failed to detect a cyber intrusion at Lincoln County, WA, where Albert did not alert the county to a ransomware attack from a known ransomware site. Albert also failed to notify Okanogan County, WA, of a cyber intrusion. Despite monitoring around the clock with the intent to alert jurisdictions of malicious traffic on their networks, Albert failed to perform its function.

Third, Albert is a black box that performs activities that the counties/states cannot monitor. The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between CIS and end users requires the end user to provide notice to its employees and contractors that they “have no reasonable expectation of privacy regarding communications or data transiting, stored on or traveling to or from county information systems, and any communications or data transiting, stored on or traveling to or from the county information system may be monitored disclosed or used for any lawful government purpose.” (Are the Montgomery County Board and Staff aware of these provisions?)

Finally, one of the strengths of our election system is its decentralization. Local management of elections makes it difficult for malicious actors to affect the outcome of elections via fraudulent means. For this reason alone, the use of centralized systems, such as Albert Sensors, should be resisted.

At the December 19, 2022 Board meeting, several Board members asked for a presentation on the Albert Sensor System and other electronic systems used by the county election system and how they interact with SBE systems and other systems outside the county. The Board agreed to a schedule for the presentation that was “in approximately the next three months.” When will this presentation be given? If the research required to prepare the requested presentation has been completed, can the Election staff provide it to the public?