

Faced with lag in technology, Senate delays voting safeguards

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TRENTON— The Senate on Monday reluctantly approved a later deadline for paper verification of votes after the state acknowledged it could not have the technology ready by the November presidential election.

If the measure is signed by Gov. Corzine, New Jersey voters will cast ballots in what could be a very close presidential contest without being able

to see their recorded votes on paper.

Sen. Nia Gill, who sponsored the original legislation mandating backup verification for electronic balloting, said she opposed granting the state an extension till January 2009. The law originally required paper receipts by January 2007.

She called the 10,000 touchscreen voting machines used throughout the state "flawed" and "insecure" and said com-

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puter scientists have hacked into them in lab tests.

"This should not be machine-specific," said Gill, D-Essex.

This is the second six-month extension state officials have sought from the Legislature. It comes after manufacturers of

the Sequoia electronic voting machines that the state uses fell behind in running their machines through the rigorous state and federal tests necessary for certification.

The Assembly recently approved the measure after the attorney general said the state could not meet its extended deadline.

"I've been told there is simply no economically feasible way around it at this point," said Sen. Nicholas Scutari, D-Union, chairman of the Senate State Government Committee, which advanced the measure last week. "It's a little aggravating that we're doing this again."

Penny Venetis, a lawyer trying to get a judge to declare electronic voting machines unconstitutional, said manufacturer Sequoia Voting Systems has thwarted efforts by several counties to have voting machines independently analyzed after problems occurred during the Feb. 5 primary.

She provided a letter from Sequoia to two Princeton computer scientists saying such testing violates the counties' licensing agreements with Sequoia and threatening legal action if the tests go forward.

Venetis favors scrapping electronic voting machines and returning to paper ballots that could be counted by optical scanners.

The Senate approved the measure 27-12.