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## **State Unveils Enhancement to Polling Place Locator**

*New system features deployed in time for November 5<sup>th</sup> Election*

Dover – Delaware Elections Commissioner Frank Calio, Lieutenant Governor John Carney and Chief Information Officer Thomas Jarrett jointly announced the launch of an important enhancement to the State’s “Polling Place Locator” that will help more citizens locate their polling places for the upcoming general election.

The announcement showcases the use of new voice-based technology to allow citizens to access information on their polling places using an ordinary telephone. Currently, the State Department of Elections maintains a Polling Place Locator system that is available to Delaware voters through the Internet.

“The Polling Place Locator is an important component in the Department of Election’s mission to support the election process,” said State Elections Commissioner Frank B. Calio. “We know that thousands of Delaware voters have used the system in the past to locate their polling place prior to going to vote. Ensuring that voters know where their polling place is a fundamental part of making sure the process works as it should.”

The November 2002 election cycle presents new challenges for the Department and the public because of changes to election districts resulting from the 2000 census. To expand the reach of the current Polling Place Locator, new voice-based technologies have been used to make this application accessible to Delawareans via a toll-free telephone number – **866-276-2353**.

“The audience for the original Polling Place Locator has traditionally been those citizens with Internet access -- about 50-60 percent of households on average,” said Lieutenant Governor John Carney. “With the new enhancements, the

audience for this existing application will be extended to all households with telephone access -- about 95 percent on average.”

The enhancement to the Polling Place Locator is the second initiative in a new project being undertaken by the State’s Department of Technology and Information. The “Access Delaware” Project is focused on providing alternative mechanisms for Delaware agencies to deliver information to citizens and taxpayers. Several weeks ago, State CIO Tom Jarrett and Lieutenant Governor Carney unveiled the first initiative in this project. The Internet Access Locator System allows Delaware citizens to use a toll-free number to locate a public Internet access point in their neighborhood.

“Internet access and the Digital Divide continue to be a challenge to State’s looking to provide services and information through the web,” said Delaware Chief Information Officer Thomas M. Jarrett. “With the advent of new voice-based technologies, which we are using as part of the Access Delaware project, a whole new avenue has opened up to provide access to government services.”

A recent survey by Web research firm Nielsen//NetRatings (<http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/>) suggests that the Digital Divide problem is a persistent one. The survey found that individuals with household incomes ranging from \$100,000 to \$150,000 are the fastest growing income group online. In contrast, individuals in households with incomes of less than \$25,000 a year averaged about 2 percent growth in representation online.

The enhancements to the Polling Place Locator are based on a technology called VoiceXML – a brief overview of how this technology works is attached.

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# Expanding the Reach of the Polling Place Locator with VoiceXML

## What is it?

This project involves the deployment of a VoiceXML-based system to provide information to Delaware voters through a toll free number. Through this number, Delaware voters will be able to identify the location of their polling place.

## Why is it important?

Ensuring voter awareness of polling places is critical to the voting process. One of the fundamental goals of the Department of Elections is to provide the public with information on where to vote. The November 2002 election cycle presents new challenges for the Department and the public because of changes to election districts resulting from the 2000 census.

The Department of elections currently provides information to the public on polling places through a variety of means, including a the web-based “Polling Place Locator.” The VoiceXML system would be an extension of the existing Polling Place Locator application, and would provide more Delaware citizens with the ability to access this information. In the past, the audience for this information has been those citizens with web access (about 50-60 percent of households on average). The VoiceXML system would extend the audience for this existing information to all households with telephone access (about 95 percent on average).

## How does it work?

The system is a VoiceXML-based application. “VoiceXML” is a non-proprietary, web-based markup language for representing human-computer dialogs, similar to HTML (HyperText Markup Language – the basic language of web pages). Just as a web browser renders HTML documents visually, a VoiceXML interpreter renders VoiceXML documents audibly. In this respect, one can think of the VoiceXML interpreter as a telephone-based, voice browser.

As with HTML documents, VoiceXML documents have web URLs and can be located on any web server. However, instead of pointing a client-side web browser at a specific URL, citizens can access a VoiceXML application by calling a toll free number from any ordinary telephone – regular or cellular.

