

The Origin of HJR 2—Electronic Records Management: Quick Win or Stubborn Elephant?

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(Spoiler alert: It's a stubborn elephant!)

HJR 2 (2013) requested the Legislative Council to assign a study of electronic records management by state and local government. The resolution was requested by the Select Committee on Efficiency in Government which met during the 2011-2012 interim. The Select Committee was created by HB 642 (2011) that directed an evaluation of priority budgeting systems as well as determinations of efficiency in three areas: health care, technology, and natural resources. In the area of technology, the Select Committee was directed to look at reducing dual data entry, moving towards paperless business, ensuring a cohesive plan for the state's information systems, and leveraging the state's investment in the data centers, all while maintaining the security and integrity of state data.

At the Select Committee's initial meeting, then State CIO Dick Clark presented to the committee and during a portion of his presentation titled "Quick Wins and Opportunities" he included bullet points for electronic records and records management.

The Select Committee formed a Subcommittee on Information Technology which met several times before bringing its recommendations to the full committee. At the subcommittee's January 9, 2012 meeting, subcommittee chairman Rep. Galen Hollenbaugh welcomed speakers on electronic records including Patti Borsberry, the State Records Manager in the Office of the Secretary of State. Ms. Borsberry indicated that electronic records management was an "ever-present issue" in the Secretary of State's Office and described two previous strategic plans, drafted in 2004 and 2008 respectively, addressing the topic. She acknowledged, however, that "no real movement" had been made with either plan due to "a lack of system tools". Mr. Clark, also on the panel, stated that electronic records management is "an elephant in the room in many states." While that idiom describes the presence of an obvious problem no one wants to discuss, the presence of a strategic plan drafted by a steering committee with 20+ members doesn't exactly indicate a reluctance to talk about an issue.

As the subcommittee work drew to a close, Rep. Kathleen Williams indicated she would appreciate "specific suggestions" to address the issue but none were offered. And so, a study resolution was born—HJR 2!

To be fair, records management is a complex topic with several entities sharing authority over different aspects of management as well as different types of records. Additionally, rapid changes in technology drive equally rapid and revolutionary changes in the way government conducts business making it difficult to determine the best course of action looking 10, 5 or even 2 years ahead. An optimistic perspective on unsuccessful previous efforts to address this topic might be that the groundwork was being laid and the right team assembled. The existing strategic plans may provide a rolling start.

This background highlights the difficulty of making progress in managing electronic records. Any effort to address an enterprisewide framework for effective electronic records management will require collaboration and commitment from all branches and levels of government. Perhaps HJR 2 can provide the framework and catalyst for resolving past difficulties and this stubborn elephant will be ridden off into the sunset.