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Request for Early Discussions on Introduction of Online Voting
for Safe Elections During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Board of Directors
Information Technology Federation of Japan

While the private and public sectors are working together to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, it is extremely difficult or even impossible for some people to cast a vote in an election in person at a polling station due to the quarantine requirement imposed on those who have tested positive for the virus and their close contacts. As elections are the bedrock of people's participation in politics, this situation clearly inhibits the exercise of voting rights—one of the most fundamental rights guaranteed to people under the Japanese constitution—and jeopardizes democracy. In order to overcome this unprecedented crisis and ensure that people in quarantine may vote in a safe manner, the Information Technology Federation of Japan requests an early start of discussions on the introduction of online voting leveraging our information technologies.

Conventionally, systems have been put in place and enforced so that people who have difficulty going to a polling station for reasons such as illness would be able to exercise their voting rights insofar as possible. This was made possible through measures such as postal voting or voting at hospitals. However, under the current circumstances, it is impossible to predict when a person may have close contact, test positive, and be quarantined as a result. We are all at risk of being quarantined immediately before voting day. Considering the time required to go through the conventional backup voting procedure, or the risks involved in opening ballots sent by the infected, it is difficult to practically ensure the voting rights of all people under such procedure.

In a voting system using information technologies, qualities that should be protected in elections can be ensured at the same level or higher compared to the conventional procedure. These include equality, confidentiality, autonomy, and the possibility of making subsequent verifications of elections. Therefore, we believe that voting system using information technologies will protect people's trust towards the electoral system and the results of the elections, which serve

as the core of democracy.

In reality, there is an increasing concern of the rise of authoritarianism through COVID-19 measures, as well as postponement of elections in democratic countries. Striking a balance between COVID-19 measures and fair elections is vital in maintaining democracy and protecting a fair and free society. Establishing a system using information technologies whereby elections can be properly carried out even during the pandemic has important significance not only in Japan, but also throughout the world. Therefore, we request the government to begin practical considerations as early as possible.

Appendix

1. Scope of online voting

Based on the principle of voting at a polling station on an election day, and as a special measure for coronavirus patients and their close contacts, online voting shall be conducted as part of absentee voting, similar to postal voting in the current system. We believe that confusion arising from the introduction of the new voting method can be avoided and the practical load on the workers in the election be minimized if maximum affinity with the current voting system is ensured in the online voting system.

It is essential that IT devices used in online voting are operated by the voters themselves and are easily operable by all, and that devices and UI with full security measures are designated and provided.

2. Ensuring security and secrecy in voting

Thorough security measures and system design are vital in order to ensure equality, confidentiality, autonomy, the possibility of making subsequent verifications of elections, and to prevent the falsification of the ballots and election results. Some measures that can be put in place for this purpose are: thorough identity verification using facial recognition, judging that voting is not being coerced by others through behavior evaluation using cameras in IT devices, protection of anonymity using double-encryption, and prevention of falsification using distributed ledger technology.

3. Considerations for local municipalities, election and infection control measures

Introduction of online voting as a COVID-19 measure should not create unnecessary confusion or excessively increase the work load in the operations of the election or the medical field. These issues as well as many of the points that should be discussed have been publicly and actively discussed in forums such as the "Panel on Measures to Improve the Voting Environment" (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications). By utilizing the results of these discussions, we will be able to seamlessly apply and extend the conventional system and

operations. As a result, we believe that we will be able to eliminate the concerns raised in the course of conducting elections as well as at medical institutions, and to continuously gain the people's trust in the fairness and correctness of the election results.

On May 15, the Information Technology Federation of Japan announced a "Policy Proposal on the Promotion of Digitalization and Online Systemization in View of Coexistence with Coronavirus," and has requested the development of online systems in the lives of the Japanese people.

We, the IT service companies, are fully committed to contributing from both the technical and service aspects, so that we can come together to create a new future for Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic.