

Written Testimony  
Senate State Government Committee Hearing  
June 6, 2017

The County Election Directors, Election Reform Committee of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, and the Eastern and Western Associations of Election Personnel have adopted a threefold agenda moving Pennsylvania voting to a new level.

### **Flexibility**

We seek the necessary legislative and constitutional changes to provide the needed flexibility by which elections are to be delivered in the Commonwealth. New methods to Pennsylvania would include no excuse absentee balloting, vote centers, and vote by mail or any combination of the three. Legislative changes would be necessary to enact any of these methods in the near future. The one size fits all precinct model detailed in the Code, written in 1937, has seen little change since its passage and no longer reflects the current standard of living. States such as Washington, Oregon and Colorado have already taken on major initiatives in updating their voting process with mail in balloting and regional vote centers. Not only have these methods reduced costs and variables in the process, but have proven to significantly increase voter participation. Additional states such as New Jersey and Nebraska and others are experimenting with similar measures. California counties are developing their own software to be run on "off the shelf" hardware. Counties are running out of assets to employ the current precinct model of voting. Poll staffing is increasingly difficult to fill. A constitutional change would be required to alleviate the personnel issues. Counties lack the sufficient funding to continue an every ten year wholesale change of voting equipment similar to what is currently in use. Locations compliant to the Americans with Disabilities Act are at a premium. Even the decline in main line Christian denominations has had a negative impact in locating polling sites. It would only seem logical to allow the county itself to determine the method that is most cost effective and efficient for its residents. For example, Lawrence County has precincts with voter counts ranging from 9 to 1,100 voters. Treating them all the same defies logic. The current generation of voting equipment will be at the end of its life expectancy in the next several years. The general consensus currently is to replace voting systems prior to the 2020 Presidential election. Now is the optimal time to make these crucial changes. Now is the time to give the counties the abilities to implement these crucial changes.

### **Funding**

Counties do not have the wherewithal to purchase the next generation of voting equipment. Assistance from the Commonwealth and/or the Federal Government is paramount, just as it was with the Help America Vote Act some years ago. Without the needed influx of capital, counties could very well be forced to return to 100% paper ballot and hand count. Delays in reporting results that come with this antiquated system would be inevitable. Increases in county property taxes and/or additional debt would become commonplace to ensure the right to vote.

### **Stop Gap Measures**

Last but certainly not least, changes to the election code are going to be necessary in order to continue to perpetuate the precinct model in the short run. These changes should include drafting or volunteering as judges of election and inspectors as opposed to electing them in municipal elections. Counties across the Commonwealth are suffering major deficiencies in poll workers as has already been discussed. Adjusting dates for filing petitions in conjunction with strict deadlines for challenges and hearings would alleviate the need for last minute changes to ballots and coding of same. Reconfiguring

the process for applying for absentee ballots and returning voted absentee ballots is vital in light of the current mail delivery standards. Counties should have the option to employ constables on Election Day as opposed to the mandate found in the code. Write-in efforts should be verified at the county election office prior to Election Day, in writing, to be counted. Straight party voting should be eliminated in order to produce a better educated electorate on the candidates and issues. Eliminating the need to appear in person on Election Day once an absentee ballot is voted, would eliminate the need to send absentee ballots to the polls. This would stream line operations and eliminate another variable in the process. Equipment and software certification efforts need to be increased drastically to give each county a wide range of products to choose from for the next generation of voting systems. There is much to be gained by increasing the competition for county orders of such equipment and programming. This list is not all encompassing by any means but gives you the flavor of the ideas from election directors across the Commonwealth.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Change is the only constant in life. The voters in Pennsylvania need a change in the manner in which they exercise their right to vote to meet the changing demands of their lives. Counties are desperate for change in order to meet their obligations to their residents to deliver a process that will allow them the optimal opportunity to vote. Change is within our grasp, but only with the coordinated effort of the counties, legislature and the administration. We can make this happen. We must make this happen. The alternative is not acceptable.

Thank you for your kind attention.

L. Edward Allison, Jr., Chairman  
Western Pennsylvania Election Personnel Association

Director  
Lawrence County Voter Registration/Elections