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Forrest K. Lehman (Director of Elections, Lycoming County)

Prepared Remarks for Senate State Government Committee

Good morning Chairman Folmer, Minority Chair Williams, and other members of the State Government Committee. Thank you for providing county election officials with this opportunity to speak with you about the current state of elections in Pennsylvania. I hope that today's hearing is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between election officials and the Legislature about ways we can improve the conduct of elections in the Commonwealth. County election officials want to work with the Legislature to ensure that our elections remain accurate, reliable, and secure, but we would also like to discuss ways to deliver elections more efficiently and cost-effectively.

My brief remarks this morning will focus on the dollars and cents.

Counties are facing increasing pressure from the media and the general public to replace their aging voting systems, but in the absence of federal or state assistance many counties cannot afford to replace these systems on their own. The will is there, but we are at a funding impasse where counties need some kind of help, but realize that financial assistance from the Commonwealth is unlikely.

In lieu of money, however, the Legislature can still help counties financially by delivering targeted election reforms that can mitigate the high costs that counties face to conduct elections and purchase next-generation voting equipment.

I will discuss just one example as part of my opening remarks, because it is perhaps the single biggest cost driver for the delivery of elections.

The 1937 Election Code requires counties to locate at least one polling place in every municipality, regardless of size or population. In 1937, this requirement was reasonable and necessary. Lycoming County, for instance, is geographically the largest county in the state. Travel within and between our most rural, least populated municipalities was probably difficult and time-consuming back then, and would have constituted a barrier to voting. In 2017, however, travelling between most of these rural municipalities has been simplified by modern vehicles and roads.

Many county election officials believe that this paradigm has become outdated, expensive, and ultimately unsustainable. It does not provide flexibility to counties; whether the municipality has 50 voters or 50,000 voters, the county must still locate a polling place within the municipality that meets federal accessibility requirements, deploy equipment to that municipality, and recruit and pay poll workers in that municipality. It imposes unnecessary administrative and financial overhead on the conduct of elections.

If we do not reform the municipality-based paradigm before counties begin purchasing next-generation voting systems to replace their aging systems, counties will be statutorily required to purchase more voting machines and those costs will be shouldered by taxpayers. Some counties simply cannot afford to purchase a 21st-century voting system if the law requires them to purchase extra equipment for the smallest municipalities in order to conduct elections under the 1937 rules.

Lycoming County has 10 townships and 1 borough with less than 300 registered voters. Under the current paradigm, my county would need to spend \$1 million to \$2 million to purchase new voting machines for all of our 86 precincts. We will continue to spend \$1,000-\$2,000 per year per precinct to compensate poll workers. We struggle to find handicap-accessible polling places in these rural areas. If the Election Code were changed to permit counties to consolidate multiple smaller townships into a single voting center, or to permit counties to mail ballots to the voters in a small township, my county could save hundreds of thousands of dollars on the purchase of new voting machines, reduce its yearly cost to train and compensate poll workers, and make it easier to find polling place facilities that comply with federal accessibility requirements.

These and other targeted election reforms would make next-generation voting systems more affordable for all 67 counties, thereby ensuring that future elections in the Commonwealth will remain accurate, reliable, and secure. The reforms would save the taxpayers of the Commonwealth tens of millions of dollars as counties purchase new voting systems, plus millions more every year in reduced staffing, licensing, and maintenance costs.

I hope that the Legislature and county election officials can maintain open lines of communication and make progress together on election reform in Pennsylvania. Thank you.