

**2017 Senate State Government Committee  
Information Meeting  
June 6, 2017**

**Remarks of Jonathan Marks  
Pennsylvania Department of State**

Chairman Folmer, Chairman Williams and members of the Senate State Government Committee:

Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee on behalf of Secretary Cortés to discuss election issues that are impacting Pennsylvania.

I will keep my comments brief since I know you have several of my esteemed colleagues from the county election offices presenting this morning before we get to questions. I'm certain they will do an excellent job explaining the issues impacting them and their constituents.

It is a pleasure to be with you to talk about the Department of State's role in the administration of elections today and the role we can play in shaping the future of election administration in Pennsylvania. Despite the additional scrutiny and pressure that accompanied Pennsylvania's position as a swing state in last year's Presidential Election, our county and precinct election officials performed admirably and delivered a smooth and fair election. In our role, the Department worked diligently to give county election officials the tools and support they needed before, during and after the Election.

For example, the Department worked collaboratively with county election officials, county commissioners, legislators and other stakeholders to launch Online Voter Registration in 2015 to significantly reduce the amount of paper applications coming into county election offices. For comparison, a total of about 1,500,000 voter registration applications were submitted on paper in 2008 – the last time prior to 2016 that there wasn't an incumbent running for President. By 2016,

the number of paper applications was reduced to about 811,000 because nearly 860,000 applications were submitted online.

In 2016, the Department also worked closely with county election officials and other stakeholders to disseminate, through traditional and digital media, information about the processes and safeguards that are in place to protect the integrity of our electoral system. Also, at the height of the concerns about foreign interference in or disruption of our Presidential election, the Department was already working with federal, state and local law enforcement authorities to understand potential threats and to develop plans to adequately respond to them. We also worked with election administrators to reassure Pennsylvania's voters that their election officials were proactively addressing any real or perceived threats to the fair and orderly administration of the General Election. Those collaborative partnerships were essential and they will continue in every election.

## **Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future**

As in prior elections, last year's Presidential election simultaneously informed us about the current state of elections in Pennsylvania and offered us a glimpse into our future. The evolving cybersecurity threats, the continued rise in the use of digital media, the relative age of our voting equipment and a shrinking pool of willing and able poll workers are all issues that we are facing now and will need to address in the immediate future.

It is not an understatement to say that these issues present significant challenges to election administration in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, but, I submit that these issues also present us with opportunities to find innovative answers to these challenges and to improve the way elections are administered in Pennsylvania. Indeed, by resolution in 2016, this body has already accepted the challenge by assembling a team of election administrators, county commissioners, voting rights

advocates, and IT professionals to research, discuss and advise you on matters pertaining to the future of voting technology in our Commonwealth.

On behalf of Secretary Cortés and all of us at the Department of State, we look forward to continuing our partnerships with the General Assembly, county election officials, voting rights advocates of every political persuasion and other stakeholders to meet head-on the challenges we face and to embrace the opportunity to enhance the administration of elections in Pennsylvania.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today.