



TESTIMONY

SENATE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

HEARING ON ELECTORAL REFORM

SENATE BILL 417

April 30, 2019

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Senators Folmer and Williams and members of the PA Senate State Government Committee:

Thank you for reviewing this written statement of support for Senate Bill 417 sponsored by Senator Scott Martin (R-Lancaster).

The PA State Tax Collectors Association was glad to see this legislation included as part of the omnibus electoral reform package being reviewed by this committee.

As you may know, Tax Collectors are elected local officials who collect various local taxes and also provide services to taxpayers on how local taxation works. In addition, a core responsibility is to inform property owners (particularly seniors) as to property tax waivers, reductions, or exemptions to which they may be entitled.

Elected Tax Collectors take these responsibilities very seriously and PSTCA tries to educate its members on professional standards for the conduct of that office.

However, sometimes there is an anomaly in the election process which Senate Bill 417 seeks to address. Although rarely occurring, there may be a situation where there were no candidates for a local office. In the case of Tax Collectors, a vacant position's duties are assumed by another governmental entity. But, what happens if there are no candidates for an elective position in the general election and someone decides to write themselves in? This situation could mean that a person could be elected by one vote, his or her own.

By a single vote, the position would not be vacant. An unanticipated consequence might be a newly elected official not having the qualifications to serve or someone who simply ran as a lark with little real interest in the position.

Senate Bill 417 closes that unusual fluke in our electoral system by saying that in order to be elected, the same number of votes must be cast in the general election as would have been required if there had been a nominating petition. This should not be an onerous barrier to those wishing to serve their communities. The signature requirement to get on the ballot for Tax Collector is ten votes.

Although not the largest election reform the committee will consider, Senate Bill 417 addresses a rare problem that can be corrected. Thus, the PA State Tax Collectors Association respectfully requests that you support this bill.

WHO WE ARE

Tax Collectors are elected local officials -- Tax Collectors. That means that for certain types of taxes, Tax Collectors are the primary and sometimes only personal contact taxpayers have with the local taxation system. In addition to collecting taxes, Tax Collectors explain how the system works and provide a quality control to make sure that the correct taxes are directed to where they should be. Local governmental authority is part of Pennsylvania's bedrock foundation and we believe the current system is cost effective for taxpayers.

Above all, the PA State Tax Collectors Association believes that the present system of elected Tax Collectors embodies government that is truly closest to the people. We also believe that the present system works efficiently and saves taxpayer dollars. The other part of our mission to elected Tax Collectors is to help them enhance those efficiencies without losing the people to people presence that is so vital in today's impersonal world.