

Independent Pennsylvanians

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Testimony Submission
Senate State Government Hearing
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Thank you for today's hearing, and the opportunity to speak to this State Government Committee.

I am Jennifer Bullock, (Montgomery County PA), coordinator of Independent Pennsylvanians. We are a diverse group of non-partisan voters advocating for full voting rights of the over 1.2 million independents in Pennsylvania. We initiate campaigns to strengthen the voice and power of non-affiliated voters. We, as a collective, call for respect, recognition and election reforms that allow for our full participation.

I love this beautiful state of ours. Pennsylvania has so much to offer, the beautiful mountains of my family's hometown of Williamsport, the rich culture of Philadelphia where I own my own small business as a psychotherapist, and the Fall foliage is a world treasure. But this state does not offer me full voting rights, along with the 1.1 million other unaffiliated voters. I can't vote in my own beloved state. That's wrong, undemocratic, and outdated.

Our group has a yearly ritual on primary day. We go out to polling sites and town squares, holding up signs such as

"I can't vote today. Ask me why?"

"I pay for the primaries, but I can't vote"

"Closed Primaries = Taxation without Representation"

We have been at it for 15 years, standing outside on primary day, writing letters to the editor, talking to State Representatives and Senators, organizing in diverse communities, and talking to each other, as voters who care about our state and the health of our democracy.

Two quick stories I would like to share with you:

- A 21-year-old joined Independent Pennsylvanians last year after she was shocked to find that she and her twin sister, newly registered to vote and eager to participate in our democracy, were both rejected at the polls. They were rejected, not because they were at the wrong site or did not have proper ID, but because they both were registered unaffiliated. Her grandparents saw the benefits of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, as African Americans gained voting protections, only to have their younger generation once again fight for the right to vote.
- The other day as I walked through my town square, a State Representative was outside an election office, with lawn signs in hand ready to post throughout the neighborhood. I waved "hi", he waved back and said, "remember to vote in the primary - and consider voting for me". I responded, "I wish I could, I like your policies, but I can't, I'm an independent".

Who are we? Independents vote for candidates, not the party. I have voted for Democrats, Republicans, Greens, Libertarians, and independents. But only in the elections I am permitted access, general elections. I am like other independents who don't want to be forced to join a party to participate in the primary, which is essentially the first round of elections that often decide who the ultimate winner is.

We care about fairness, process, and pragmatics. We believe in decoupling voting rights with party affiliation. We believe that parties should be participants in elections, not gatekeepers of them.

We are the thousands of ordinary folks who have signed our petitions in support of an open primary who say 'yes, I will sign your petition. I remember being shocked when I learned I could not vote as an independent, I moved to PA from another state that allows independents to vote in the primary, PA should be that way too!'

We are 16% of the electorate in Pennsylvania. We are veterans who are independent at high rates because of the value of serving the country, not a party. We are young people who are independent at high rates because young people want to participate yet are figuring things out and don't want to be locked in. We are new citizens who don't want to join a party because "party" means something very different where they are from. We are state employees who feel strongly that they can best do their job if they stay out of party politics. There are so many reasons. All important,

all connected to how Pennsylvania and the country is changing, evolving, and shifting. And our numbers are growing, just like in every other state. Why should I and 1.2 million other citizens be penalized and shut out of voting?

As a psychotherapist as well as an activist, I see how empowering it is to be able to determine our destiny, including who we affiliate with, personally and politically.

With our world in crisis, we need all hands-on deck. Excluding the diverse range of voices that make up Pennsylvania's independents hurts our collective wellbeing. We are growing. We notice who speaks to us. We watch who continues to exclude us. And we vote in the general election.

With increased polarization and decreased voter turnout, the time is now for you to lead us in joining many states that have an open or non-partisan election system.

Let's make our first round of elections, the primary, open to independents. We help pay for them so let us in. Don't require us to join a party to vote. Our yearly ritual of going to polls with our signs "I can't vote today, ask me why" will no longer be needed. #letallvotersvote.

Independent Pennsylvanians support SB 690 as an important and useful step in the direction of fairness, voter choice and better outcomes for all. We ask that the Senate body can vote on this bill that would repeal closed primaries in PA.

You have the power to move us forward. The time is now.

Thank you for your time and consideration.