



## Perspectives on PA Election Process

House State Government Committee Public Hearing, April 15, 2021

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania commends the work of the House State Government Committee in exploring best election practices in use in other states and in inviting input and feedback from county commissioners, election officials and other election stakeholders.

The work of the League of Women Voters is always informed by foundational principles, beginning with the understanding that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. For over a century, the League of Women Voters has fought to protect the rights of eligible voters and expand access for those who have been left out of our democratic process.

To that end, LWV PA supports effective election laws that ensure that elections are accessible, transparent, fair, secure, and recountable, promote universal voter participation, and provide voters with meaningful choices when they go to the polls.

Act 77 of 2019 introduced significant needed changes to Pennsylvania's elections, making it possible for the first time for all Pennsylvanians to vote by mail. That historic reform yielded expanded participation in the 2020 election even as Covid-19 made voting in person more difficult. We strongly endorse continued no-excuse vote-by-mail, as well as the continued use of early voting sites. These changes expanded access for large segments of the PA population in all parts of the commonwealth. Voters from a wide range of demographics and party affiliations made use of and expressed appreciation for these changes.

Further clarification is needed on a range of issues, as the 2020 elections made clear.

### **Some specific recommendations:**

1. Clarify the definition of what it means to pre-canvas ballots and provide time for counties to begin opening, sorting and preparing ballots for scanning 10 to 14 days before election day.
2. Simplify rules surrounding ballot return and ensure the ability of voters to cure ballot defects.
3. Provide population-based standards for the minimum number of polling places, drop boxes and early voting locations.
4. Establish best-practice standards for correction of voter roles. LWVPA strongly supports automatic voter registration as a way to reduce costs and errors and allow for easy updates and corrections.
5. Provide county election officials with uniform standards for training and implementation.

**A resource LWVPA strongly recommends to the State Government Committees and staff as they continue their work: [Logical Election Policy: Report and Recommendations of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Task Force on Elections, January 2020.](#)**

**The following details clarify specifics of LWVPA positions.**

These were informed in reference to practices in use in other states and determined by consensus after extensive study and discussion by local Leagues. We believe adoption of these positions would safeguard our rights, streamline the election process and yield savings of time, funding and human resources at the county and state level.

**Voter Registration:**

**LWVPA supports:**

- Allowing eligible citizens to both register or change their registration status and cast a ballot on the day of a primary or election;
- Allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote;
- Allowing 17-year-olds who will be 18 years old on or before the date of a General Election to register and vote for candidates in the corresponding primary;
- Automatic voter registration and universal automatic voter registration, as long as the process adequately addresses concerns over mistakenly registering non-citizens and others who are ineligible. Those who are preregistered should be able to opt-out if they so desire; and
- Enabling voters to provide information that was missing on their voter registration applications when they go to vote on Primary or Election Day and to vote on a provisional ballot.

**Election Procedures**

**LWVPA supports:**

- State administered elections with a single appointed official having authority to define responsibility and to direct the activities of county and district election officials;
- Strict enforcement of election procedures;
- Appointment of district election officers by county boards of elections from lists submitted by political parties on the basis of bipartisan representation, qualifying tests, and mandatory training;
- Use of public buildings as polling places wherever practical;
- Wearing of identification badges by election officials;
- Requiring that all poll watchers be residents of the county in which the election district where they are assigned is located;
- Requiring that all poll watchers who challenge a voter's eligibility at the polls be required to write out their challenge and sign an affidavit with an Election Official as witness that the challenge is truthful and in good faith;
- Requiring that both poll workers and poll watchers take training authorized by the state;
- Providing registered voters with sample ballots before Election Day;
- Giving notice to voters of their appropriate polling place locations;
- Providing public and voter notification of voters' rights at the polling place
- Extension of election hours and use of early voting locations

## **Voting systems:**

### **LWVPA supports the LWVUS position:**

- Voting systems employ a voter-verifiable paper ballot or other paper record, said paper being the official record of the voter's intent; and
- The voter can verify, either by eye or with the aid of suitable devices for those who have impaired vision, that the paper ballot/record accurately reflects his or her intent; and
- Such verification takes place while the voter is still in the process of voting; and
- The paper ballot/record is used for audits and recounts; and
- the vote totals can be verified by an independent hand count of the paper ballot/record; and
- routine audits of the paper ballot/record in randomly selected precincts can be conducted in every election, and the results published by the jurisdiction.
- For further detail: [2009 Report on Election Audits](#)

## **Absentee Voting**

### **LWVPA supports:**

- Simplified procedures for all qualified absent electors;
- Guarantees against fraud;
- Protection of the secrecy of the ballot, including the counting of absentee ballots at the county level;
- Measures to make voting more accessible by providing any registered voter with alternatives to casting a ballot in person on the day of a Primary or General Election;
- Simplifying the processes for casting an Emergency Absentee Ballot, including eliminating the need to have the application notarized;  
Use of secure ballot boxes for ballot return

## **Prison Voting**

- LWV PA supports offering voter registration and absentee ballot applications to eligible jail and prison inmates and to inmates upon their release.
- Provisions in the Election Code that facilitate absentee ballot application and voting by residents of public institutions should be extended to residents of local, state, and federal penal institutions who are qualified to vote.
- All inmates should be considered residents of the election district where they lived before they were incarcerated.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comment. LWVPA welcomes further opportunity to review proposed legislation and to offer perspective from our collective century of national experience in safeguarding the precious right to vote.

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