Gov. Wolf: Pass Legislation to Enhance Secure and Efficient Elections

Allow earlier processing of mail-in ballots before election day
Voters encouraged to sign up now for a mail-in ballot, return it well before the Nov. 3 election
In-person voting remains safe

Harrisburg, PA – With only seven weeks left before the Nov. 3 election, Governor Tom Wolf is urging immediate legislative action to ensure voters receive their mail-in ballots early and give counties more time to process and count ballots before election day. The governor also reassured Pennsylvanians that in-person voting is safe, and all eligible votes will be counted.

"Voting during a pandemic will be different for all of us, but I remain confident that no matter how you vote – our state's election systems are safe and secure," said Gov. Wolf. "Counting a record number of votes may not be complete on election night, but what's most important is that every vote is counted, and the results are accurate, even if it takes more time than usual.

"We've made great improvements in our elections with mail-in ballots, more security and new voting systems with a paper trail. But this will be a historic election and the nation is watching, so the legislature should take immediate action to make it better. The smart changes I have outlined will strengthen our elections, help people to vote safely from home and allow counties to more efficiently process the surge in ballots so results are available faster."

Gov. Wolf's recommended election improvements include:

- **Allowing counties to start pre-canvassing ballots 21 days before the election day to get accurate results faster.** The current law restricts counties from beginning this process until 7 a.m. on election day. The time-consuming procedure involves scanning and verifying the ballot envelope, checking the voter's eligibility, opening the mail and secrecy envelopes, and removing and scanning the ballot. Counties would not tabulate or report vote totals until polls close at 8 p.m. on election day.
- **Allowing counties to count eligible ballots postmarked by election day and received by the Friday following election day** to ensure that all ballots mailed by the deadline are counted.

- **Requiring counties to start sending mail-in ballots at least 28 days before the election** rather than 14 days as currently required. Many counties mail ballots to voters even earlier, but this change ensures voters who apply early have at least four weeks to receive and return their ballot.
- **Letting counties appoint poll workers to vacant positions earlier than five days before an election**. More poll workers are still needed, and the Department of State is encouraging businesses, colleges and organizations to reach out to their county elections office and volunteer at their local precincts.

"A year ago, we made the biggest improvement to our election laws in 80 years, including the option to vote by mail," said Gov. Wolf. "That historic agreement is making voting more convenient and more secure for millions of Pennsylvanians. Now is the time for another historic agreement. We've done it before, and we can do it again."

Joining the governor for a news conference at the York Grace Brethren Church, a York County polling place, were Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, York County Commissioner Doug Hoke, Montgomery County Commissioner Dr. Valerie A. Arkoosh, Rep. Kevin Boyle, Democratic Chairman of the House State Government Committee, and Rep. Carol Hill-Evans.

"Pennsylvanians have more secure, accessible and convenient voting options for the 2020 election than ever before," Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar said. "They can cast their ballot by mail. In a few weeks, they can vote early in person at their county election offices. Or they can vote at their local polling place on election day. The additional reforms we seek will enhance these options, provide additional safeguards so that all eligible votes may be counted, and ensure we can provide timely election results."

Voters overwhelmingly embraced mail-in voting in the June Primary, the first time it was an option under Act 77 of 2019, which Gov. Wolf signed last year. Nearly 1.5 million votes were cast by mail, more than voted in-person at polling places.

"We have a responsibility as lawmakers to ensure free and fair elections," said Senator Anthony Williams, Democratic Chairman of the Senate State Government Committee. "Now is the time to make vital changes to the election code that will support counties' ability to count ballots and staff polling places, not put roadblocks in the way of Pennsylvanians exercising their right to vote."

The Department of State and counties, which administer Pennsylvania's elections, continue making improvements. Many counties will use high-speed scanners and other technology to quickly process millions of mail-in ballots in the Nov. 3 election.

The Department of State is providing counties with masks and face shields for poll workers, along with hand sanitizer, floor marking tape for social distancing, plastic "sneeze guards" and other supplies so Pennsylvanians can safely exercise their right to vote during the COVID-19 emergency.

The Department of State is also launching a public awareness campaign explaining how to apply for a mail-in ballot and will partner with the Philadelphia 76ers, Pittsburgh Penguins and Allegheny and Philadelphia counties on voting initiatives.

Eligible Pennsylvanians can register to vote by Oct. 19 and apply for their mail-in or absentee ballot by Oct. 27 online at votespa.com, in person at their county election offices, or by paper forms submitted by mail. Online application for mail-in and absentee ballots are also available in Spanish. Pennsylvania is not automatically sending ballots to voters.

After verifying the voter's eligibility, counties send the voter a mail-in ballot with return postage paid by the Department of State, so casting a ballot is free to voters. Voters can return their ballot by mail, in person at their county election offices or at other authorized drop-off locations, which many counties expect to provide.

For voters who prefer to vote in person, polling places will be available in all counties on election day, Nov. 3, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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