

**Testimony presented by
KEYSTONE VOTES
to the
Senate State Government Committee
from
10 a.m. to noon
on
Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2017
regarding
Pennsylvania Election Security**

Majority Chairman Folmer, Minority Chairman Williams and members of the Committee: Thank you for providing an opportunity to Keystone Votes to submit testimony on the record regarding efforts to modernize Pennsylvania's electoral process to enhance security in the system. Your work on this issue is important and timely.

Election security remains a shared priority for all of us, so all of us need to work together to enhance the integrity of this fundamental cornerstone of American life. That is among the primary focuses of Keystone Votes in Pennsylvania as well.

Keystone Votes is a nonpartisan coalition of advocacy and community organizations joined together to launch a coordinated campaign to update Pennsylvania's election system. Members represent communities across Pennsylvania --- from seniors and working people to immigrants, people with disabilities and faith leaders. Coalition members include leading Pennsylvania-based and national voting advocates and election administration experts.

All of us agree: Every election matters. Pennsylvania just finished one election cycle and another is about to begin. It is critical, especially in our current political climate, that citizens have faith in the security and integrity of the electoral process.

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, voters are afraid that outside interference and tampering are diminishing the power of honest votes. It should be a top priority for legislators and election officials to restore faith in our elections with commonsense reforms. Any question in voters' minds that their vote will count has the potential to fatally undermine the bedrock of our democracy.

Fortunately, in Pennsylvania, we know our election system works well, but there are still steps we can take to make it work even better. Again, we thank the Committee for convening this hearing to explore the issues and identify ways we can modernize our system to enhance security. Keystone Votes is eager to work with you.

To accomplish these goals: **Investment in both hardware and software is essential.**

The single most important thing the General Assembly can do is to help all 67 counties buy new, modern and secure voting machines to replace those that are now almost 20 years old, and to support and finance the implementation of improvements such as electronic poll books and updates to database technology.

An electronic poll book, also known as an e-poll book, typically is either hardware, software or a combination of the two that allows election officials to review and/or maintain voter register information for an election, but does not actually count votes. This software or hardware is used in place of paper-based poll books. Functions include voter lookup, verification, identification, precinct assignment, ballot assignment, voter history update and other functions such as name change, address change and/or redirecting voters to correct voting location.

Simply put: Updating technology is the best way to guarantee the integrity of the election process and protect it from outside interference.

Additionally, the Department of State should use its existing statutory authority to ensure that every eligible voter who registers to vote is added to the rolls on time, or given an explanation as to why they were not added. Last year, more than 25,000 valid voter registrations were delayed until just days before the election, and many more were outright lost.

Even though Pennsylvania's election system works well for many voters, some qualified registrants still face challenges in casting a ballot. Modernizing election technology and confirming that all eligible citizens are able to vote --- particularly seniors, veterans, voters with disabilities and working people, all of whom often face obstacles in our voting process --- should be top priorities.

Although Pennsylvania's online voter registration system is making it easier, lifelong voters who move --- even in their own town or city --- as well as new voters, frequently miss 30-day voter registration deadlines, preventing them from voting in their correct polling place. Increasing flexibility and choice reduces barriers to voting and gives all citizens the opportunity to participate in our elections.

Other states already have taken common-sense steps to update their election systems, so we know from experience that these policies work, that they are cost effective, and that they will preserve the integrity of our elections. Equally as important, they have garnered broad support from Republicans and Democrats alike.

And that's what we need --- all sides coming together to focus on solutions, which is why we are encouraged by this Committee's bipartisan cooperation.

Unfortunately, more generally, there is still too much partisan bickering, including recent complaints about inadvertent registrations by non-citizens, an issue this Committee is examining. It should be noted that those non-citizens who registered did so inadvertently, because of an error at state Drivers' License Centers, and many took proactive steps to address the issue when they discovered the problem.

We commend the actions of Gov. Tom Wolf and his administration to address this issue, one that has stretched for many years and across multiple administrations of both parties. This is not a partisan issue, and shouldn't be.

Since the incident unfolded, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has taken steps to address the issue. PennDOT should continue its work with the Department of State to update election technology and bring elections into the 21st century. This will help prevent the errors that come from out-of-date systems.

At the same time, it is important to keep this single election issue in perspective: According to testimony presented by the Department of State before the House State Government Committee on Oct. 25, the 544 ballots cast by possible non-citizens between 2000 and 2017, when Pennsylvania held 35 elections with a total of 93.6 million ballots cast, represented just 0.00000581 percent of those ballots.

Like you, we agree that any potential flaw in our voting system must be addressed. And again, we applaud PennDOT and the Department of State for their ongoing efforts to ensure the absolute security of our electoral process.

We all share a desire for accurate voter rolls and clean elections. But we firmly believe that it is equally important for the commonwealth to do everything in its power to ensure that all of its citizens have the opportunity to participate fully and equally in civic life. The fact is that the vast majority of Pennsylvanians are worried about declining voter participation rates, which also undermine our electoral process.

Common-sense updates like optional vote-by-mail, early voting, and same-day registration would get more people voting regularly. Our voting system needs to accommodate new realities and reflect the needs of today's citizens.

Modernizing and securing our elections should be a top priority for election officials and state legislators alike. Pennsylvania voters deserve a safe, secure and modern election system. Because election reform takes time, state legislators should get started now to protect our system for the 2018 elections.

Whether local, state or national in scope, our elections are an important way for eligible Pennsylvanians to participate in our democracy. While our voting system works well, we can do more to make our elections even more secure.

Voting is the most important way for American citizens to have a say over how our democracy works. We need a modern system that responds to modern threats so that all eligible Pennsylvanians can have their voices heard. And, when we modernize our system, we are able to implement the most up-to-date security systems to protect our elections from all threats.

###