



Bipartisan Leadership Strengthening Democratic Process Through Election Reform Package

A few weeks ago, communities across the state held elections to determine the next crop of local leaders. Equally important, last week's election served as a dress rehearsal for the 2020 presidential elections.

It's easy to imagine what could go wrong in a busy 2020 cycle --- new voting systems, voters waiting in long lines, turmoil outside the polls, and more.

The 2019 primary election didn't reveal too many of these issues, but Pennsylvania's biggest problem once again was on display: We run elections like it is still 1937, the year most of our election rules were written.

Something needs to change before the next major election in 2020.

One proposal gaining support is a measure to give Pennsylvanians the option to vote by mail.

Optionally voting by mail --- also known as absentee voting without an excuse --- is the standard in so many other states because it makes voting more convenient, and because it addresses many of the challenges that limit voters' Election Day access.

But in Pennsylvania, where not much has changed with our election laws in a generation, it's simply not a reality, nor are other important reforms needed to update and modernize how residents vote.

That could soon change.

Over the last year, a bipartisan chorus of Pennsylvania lawmakers, led by Senator Mike Folmer, one of the architects of a broad reform package, has begun in earnest to update the state's outdated election system as a way to modernize and strengthen the democratic process.

At the center of it all is a plan to make the use of absentee ballots less restrictive so eligible voters have that option to vote by mail.

As a nonpartisan coalition comprising 41 organizations that have been working for years to update Pennsylvania's election laws, Keystone Votes couldn't agree more. There's no reason every voter should have to vote on one specific day.

Pennsylvanians face more challenges than ever before --- work schedules, educational pursuits, and family commitments vary dramatically among residents, all of whom have an important stake in the outcome of our elections.

None of them should be penalized by a system that creates barriers to voting.

Voting by mail would offer eligible voters another way to cast their ballots. Not only would it make voting more accessible for those with physical disabilities, but it also would relieve pressures on Election Day for voters and poll workers alike.

Twenty-seven other states and the District of Columbia already offer "no excuse" absentee ballots, and 30 states and D.C. already offer citizens the option to vote by mail.

Pennsylvanians need more than one way to cast their ballots in 2020. Not only is this about bringing our laws into the 21st century, but it's also about finding ways to increase participation and enhance security through voter-marked ballots.

The only barrier to implementing this reform in time for the next election is political parties turning this into a partisan issue when it isn't. Making sure elections run well is simply good government.

And that appears to be the intent of this broader reform package. Many of the measures have been tried and tested in other states, garnering broad support from Republicans and Democrats alike. So, we know that these policies work, that they are cost effective, and that they will preserve the integrity of our elections.

They just haven't been implemented here ... yet.

Lawmakers like Sen. Folmer, as well as local election directors, deserve credit taking the lead on modernizing our state's elections. Increasing flexibility and choice reduces barriers and gives every eligible voter the opportunity to participate in our elections and ensure their voices are heard.

But a lot of work still needs to be done to cross that finish line. The challenge now is keeping it all from getting dragged down by partisan politics or bureaucracy so implementation is delayed.

The actions being taken now represent some of the most significant steps in 60 years. Let's keep the momentum going so we can get it done in time for 2020, lest we're forced to wait another generation for change.

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