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Voting Machines Just Part of Ongoing Election Modernization Process

HARRISBURG (March 10, 2021) – The House State Government Committee today convened its fifth of 12 election-related hearings, with a special focus on voting machines. The 2020 election marked the first time most Pennsylvania counties used new voting machines after the state required all county election offices to put in place systems capable of leaving a paper trail of votes that can be manually audited and recounted.

“The security and integrity of our election system is an issue that transcends partisan politics,” said Ray Murphy, state coordinator for Keystone Votes. “Lawmakers and the administration proved that when they worked together last legislative session to provide funding to help counties finance upgrades and begin the modernization process. But there is still more we can do. To ensure safe, secure, modern elections, continued investment in both hardware and software is essential. That means not only new voting systems, like we have now, but also electronic poll books and updates to database technology.”

Keystone Votes, a nonpartisan coalition comprising 42 civil rights, civil liberties and good government groups working in all 67 counties to modernize Pennsylvania’s election system, pushed strongly for the new, secure, accessible and modern voting machines as a way to ensure Pennsylvania voters experience 21st century security and access at the ballot box.

The coalition this year is urging the General Assembly and administration to continue its bipartisan work on a comprehensive reform plan that would update election laws and implement policy changes to enhance voter engagement and security. Among the recommendations:

Improve Vote-by-Mail Process

- Extend **pre-canvassing** to allow counties to begin processing ballots prior to Election Day—pre-canvassing isn’t vote counting—and establish a better voter notification process to enable simple mistakes to be fixed and **ensure ballots are completed accurately.**

- Allow mail-in ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day **but arrive at the county election office after Election Day.**
- Allow the “**National Change of Address Form**” to serve as an update for voter registration and vote by mail.

Modernize Process to Enhance Security, Voter Access

- Allow **early in-person voting** to relieve congestion at polling locations and give voters with challenging work schedules or family situations the chance to choose the time that works best for them.
- Permit **same-day voter registration**, as most residents do not become engaged in elections until the final weeks, when campaigns reach their peak.
- Establish **vote centers**, giving voters the chance to cast a ballot whether they are by their home, job, school or anywhere that is convenient, and relieve county pressure on poll worker recruitment.

Provide Funding to Support Secure, Efficient Operations

- Ensure counties have the funds for **satellite election offices** that provide convenient voter registration services and mail-in and absentee ballot application processing and voting.
- Provide funding to help counties purchase and implement **electronic poll books** to improve election security and accuracy by relying on real-time data.

Election reform issues have taken center stage in the General Assembly this year.

Besides the House State Government Committee hearings, the Senate is conducting its own review with its Special Committee on Election Integrity and Reform.

As part of his proposed 2021-22 General Fund budget presentation, Gov. Tom Wolf called for reforms like same-day voter registration and funding to help counties purchase and implement equipment such as e-poll books.

The Pennsylvania Election Law Advisory Board, established under Act 12 of 2020, convened its first meeting in February to make recommendations to the General Assembly about ways to improve the election process.

For the full legislative agenda, please visit www.KeystoneVotes.org.

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Keystone Votes, a nonpartisan coalition comprising 42 advocacy and community organizations across the state, has been urging the commonwealth to implement reforms that would modernize the state's election system and update technology to enhance security and accessibility. More at www.keystonevotes.org.