

# Keystone Votes

## THE COALITION FOR MODERN ELECTIONS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:** Ray Murphy  
P: 215-847-2503  
E: [rmurphy@pavoice.org](mailto:rmurphy@pavoice.org)

### **Keystone Votes Backs Primary Change but Worries about Provision to Authorize Closing, Consolidating Polling Places** *General Assembly must provide to ensure costs of changes are covered*

**HARRISBURG (March 24, 2020)** – As the General Assembly advances a measure (S.B. 422) to move the state’s Primary Election from April to June, which Keystone Votes fully supports, the coalition expressed concern today about a provision that potentially could disenfranchise eligible voters, especially older residents, people with disabilities, and those who lack access to reliable transportation.

The amendment that moves the election from April 28 to June 2 also includes a change that would permit county election officials to close and consolidate polling places, regardless of whether the new election district borders the district where the polling place initially was located, and without the usual court approval.

“It is unsafe to hold the primary election in April. Without a doubt, moving the date is the right thing to do,” said Ray Murphy, state coordinator for Keystone Votes. “At the same time, especially during this crisis, Pennsylvanians want assurances that a free and fair election will remain available to all eligible voters. Giving counties the authority to move a precinct all the way across the town could disenfranchise eligible voters.”

If the provision allowing precinct changes is approved, then Keystone Votes wants every eligible voter to be notified by mail, e-mail, and telephone of any changes to their polling location.

Moving the Primary Election is no easy task, and Keystone Votes praised the bipartisan work of the administration and General Assembly to secure a compromise. But all of these changes could carry unforeseen costs. Lawmakers and the administration must continue their bipartisan work to ensure any costs related to election administration changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are covered.

Even before S.B. 422, Keystone Votes had been actively engaged with the Pennsylvania Department of State, legislators, and election officials to fix technical and administrative flaws within Act 77 of 2019, the state’s sweeping voter reform law. That needs to continue.

County election directors and the Pennsylvania Department of State must accelerate their work to make fixes in mail-in ballot administrative policies. Because unprecedented times demand unprecedented responses, the Department of State should prepare for secure and accessible mail-in voting by immediately sending ballot applications to all eligible voters via U.S. mail and e-mail.

State and county election officials also should consider new health and safety protocols at polling places and county election offices.

Keystone Votes, a nonpartisan coalition comprising 43 civil rights, civil liberties, and good government groups, as well as large civic engagement organizations with members in all 67 counties, has provided its recommendations to the state and other stakeholders. The full list is available at [www.KeystoneVotes.org](http://www.KeystoneVotes.org) (click “Newsroom” and scroll to “Correspondence”).

On Monday, the House State Government Committee sent the measure (S.B. 422) to the full House, which is supposed to take up the amendments Tuesday. A final version of the bill could be voted as early as Wednesday. The measure would require Senate concurrence, and the bill could get to the governor for his signature before the end of the week.

\* \* \* \* \*

***Keystone Votes, a nonpartisan coalition comprising 43 advocacy and community organizations working to update Pennsylvania’s election system, has been urging the state to start working now on reforms that would modernize the state’s election system, help counties buy modern machines, and update technology to enhance security and accessibility before the 2020 elections. More at [www.keystonevotes.org](http://www.keystonevotes.org).***