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Keystone Votes Testifies before House, Outlines Agenda to Ensure Safe, Transparent Elections

HARRISBURG (April 1, 2021) – Members of the nonpartisan Keystone Votes coalition, one of the state’s leading and most respected voices when it comes to modernizing Pennsylvania’s election process, today presented a legislative roadmap to help lawmakers ensure safe, transparent elections that are accessible to all eligible voters.

“Voters not only need to be heard at the polls on election day, but their voices also need to be heard as we continue to discuss ways to modernize Pennsylvania elections,” **said Ray Murphy, State Coordinator of Keystone Votes.** “By modernizing Pennsylvania’s election in a holistic way, we can make our process safer, more transparent and more accessible --- not just for those who need special assistance but also for the thousands of eligible voters who face other institutional barriers that simply make it too difficult or impossible for them to cast their ballots.

Murphy and Peri Jude Radecic, CEO of Disability Rights Pennsylvania, also a Keystone Votes member, were among those who testified today at the seventh in a series of hearings that the House State Government Committee has held to review the 2020 elections.

“Through our work helping voters with disabilities during the 2020 primary and general elections, DRP identified barriers to people with disabilities successfully casting a ballot,” **said Radecic of Disability Rights Pennsylvania.** “All of these hurdles are fixable, but it will take collaboration between policy-makers, the counties, and the disability community.”

Last year was the first time Pennsylvania allowed the no-excuse vote-by-mail process. More than 2.6 million voters embraced the new law and submitted mail-in ballots during the 2020 General Election. While the rollout of any new idea comes with growing pains, there are things the administration and General Assembly can do to improve the system.

Keystone Votes wants Pennsylvania to **improve its vote-by-mail process** by changing the pre-canvassing process, establishing clear and unified guidelines around a better voter notification process, and allowing mail-in ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day but arrive at the county election office after Election Day.

The coalition also recommends **modernizations to enhance safety and access** by establishing vote centers, authorizing same-day voter registration, and allowing early in-person voting. Some of these provisions, such as vote centers, would require fewer people to staff an election, relieving much of the pressure election administrators face recruiting poll workers. Allowing early in-person voting also would 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. There are currently 17 states that permit the use of vote centers and 33 states that have adopted early voting.

Funding to support safe, transparent election operations also is essential, according to the coalition. As the state continues to review and consider new election laws, lawmakers also must ensure that counties have the funds they need to administer new requirements. That includes helping counties purchase and implement electronic poll books, or e-poll books, to improve election security and accessibility using real-time data. At least 41 states and the District of Columbia currently authorize the use of e-poll books.

“Pennsylvanians face more challenges than ever before --- farmers in the field, small business owners working long hours, students with educational pursuits, and individuals with family commitments,” Murphy said. “All of these individuals have an important stake in the outcome of our elections. None of them should be penalized by a system that creates barriers to voting. All of them deserve access, too.”

For Keystone Votes’ full legislative agenda, or for copies of the testimony, 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.