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## **Time is Running out for State to Address Election Issues**

**HARRISBURG (July 23, 2020)** – Time is running out for the General Assembly and administration to ensure that all eligible voters can exercise their right to vote in November without risking their health and safety, according to testimony submitted by Keystone Votes.

The Senate State Government Committee convened a hearing today to examine some of the issues that need to be addressed before General Election. The June primary exposed several unique challenges facing the state as it prepares for another election during this pandemic.

Although considerable attention has been focused on mail-in ballots, and rightly so --- in the primary, nearly 1.5 million voters cast ballots using the mail-in or absentee voting options, or nearly 51 percent of all votes cast --- many voters still plan to vote in person in November.

More works needs to be done to ensure voters can access local polling places safely, and that those locations are staffed properly with trained workers, to avoid confusion and the potential for disenfranchisement during a heavy turnout election.

The reality is that there is unlikely to be enough poll workers --- many of whom are consider at risk because of their age --- to staff the usual voting locations in November.

**Keystone Votes wants the state to give counties the flexibility to consolidate polling places now, so they can find the best alternative locations and set realistic goals for poll worker recruitment. There also must be a limit on the number of voters these consolidated polling locations serve to ensure social distancing and protect public health and safety.**

**Because of challenges staffing these locations, Keystone Votes says poll workers should be permitted to be assigned anywhere in the county --- not just their home precincts.**

“Time is running out,” said Ray Murphy, state coordinator for Keystone Votes. “There is no way polling places will open as normal in November because of the pandemic. The House and Senate

need to schedule a vote ASAP that allows election officials to enact a plan to consolidate polls in a way that allows voters to safely cast ballots, close to their homes.”

Because of the large number of voters who used mail-in votes during the primary, there was broad consensus among the testifiers --- Republican and Democrat alike --- for pre-canvassing, especially considering that number is expected to multiply in General Election.

**Counties must be permitted to pre-canvass mail-in ballots well before Election Day, instead of waiting until 7 a.m. on Election Day as provided under existing law.** Pre-canvassing allows counties to open both the secrecy and outer envelope, flatten and stack the ballots, and then lock them in a cabinet to be tabulated at the normal time.

The coalition also wants to **allow ballots post-marked on Election Day to be counted up until seven days after the election.** In the primary, disruptions caused by the coronavirus resulted in ballots that did not make it back to county election offices by 8 p.m. on Election Day, especially because of challenges facing the U.S. Postal Service.

“We must be proactive and start planning now for possible changes to the way we conduct elections in response to the coronavirus outbreak so that we have enough time to execute the November election properly,” Murphy said. “We don’t know what the coming months may bring, but our democracy depends on citizens safely and security exercising their right to vote.

**For a copy of Keystone Votes’ submitted testimony and legislative priorities, please visit [www.KeystoneVotes.org](http://www.KeystoneVotes.org) and click “Newsroom.”**

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*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. The coalition has been working for years to update Pennsylvania’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).*