



**TESTIMONY ON
VOTING ISSUES HEADED INTO THE 2020 GENERAL ELECTION**

Presented to the House Democratic Policy Committee

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The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is a non-profit, non-partisan association providing legislative, educational, insurance, research, technology, and similar services on behalf of all of the Commonwealth's 67 counties.

We appreciate the opportunity offer our remarks on voting issues headed into the 2020 general election in November. Counties have a significant responsibility in assuring elections remain fair, secure and accessible at every step of the process. This year, the task is complicated greatly, as elections directors, county commissioners and other county officials also hold the unprecedented responsibility of considering risk to public health in holding an election during a global pandemic.

First, we appreciate the General Assembly's efforts to make necessary and quick changes to the primary election in light of the pandemic. The provisions included in Act 12 allowed for counties to continue to administer the election despite the looming COVID-19 pandemic and counties additional time to monitor the situation and evaluate appropriate steps to mitigate disruptions cause by these significant public health concerns.

Counties learned a great deal their experience with the June 2 primary election that we now hope will inform clear and prompt policy changes to ensure an accessible and secure general election on Nov. 3, 2020. With only a little over five weeks until the general election, counties urge the General Assembly's consideration of the following measures as soon as possible to allow counties to successfully implement them.

Allow counties to begin the pre-canvass period up to three weeks prior to the election.

As expected, during the June primary it took several days in most counties to fully process all of the mail-in ballots because of the sheer volume and the inability to begin the pre-canvass before 7 a.m. election day. Of the nearly 2.9 million votes cast during the June primary, more than 40% were cast by mail-in ballot.

In the recent Act 35 report provided by the Department of State, about 45 of the 67 counties reported starting their pre-canvass period before noon on election day during the primary, yet in about half of the counties, ballots were still being counted more than a week later. *This clearly demonstrates the need for an earlier pre-canvass period:* the day of the election, counties are consumed with the critical tasks of implementing a successful in-person election, and may be unable or unwilling to add additional tasks such as pre-canvassing on top of a day that is already very long and very busy.

Allowing counties to begin the pre-canvass process up to three weeks in advance would offer a more meaningful option to complete pre-canvass procedures such as verifying the barcode number and voter's information on the outer envelope match the information in the SURE system, opening envelopes and removing and flattening the tri-fold ballot – all following appropriate security and chain of command protocols for all individuals involved in the process – to prepare ballots to be placed into high-speed scanners. Counties are not asking for the

ability to begin tabulating votes during the pre-canvass period, just to complete the time-consuming manual work of preparing the ballots to be scanned.

Without an extended pre-canvass period, counties will face very real challenges in providing timely results following the election, especially a highly visible presidential election. For context, in the 2016 presidential election, more than 6 million total votes were cast, or double the number cast in the 2020 primary. If mail-in trends continue in this November's election, the number of ballots will be far too overwhelming for counties to process on Nov. 3 alone, and it may take days or even weeks until final results are known.

Extend Act 12 provisions to allow appointment of election officers from anywhere in the county.

Because of the spread of COVID-19, counties had significant challenges leading up to the June primary because of a decline in the availability of poll workers. With the pandemic still very much a reality, and these challenges not expected to go away, the flexibility offered for the primary election under Act 12 must be extended to the November general election.

Even where physical buildings are available to serve as polling places, counties are struggling to recruit and maintain enough poll workers to execute all of the work that goes into holding an election. The demographic of Pennsylvania's poll workers tends to be senior citizens, which is also the demographic most at risk to experience severe impacts as a result of contracting COVID-19. Counties had more than 30% turn over in poll workers for the June primary and anticipate this number to be even greater in November.

Many counties have had to think through their training for poll workers more strategically. Even where counties are able to identify a sufficient crew of poll workers to meet their needs, they must also figure out how to hold training on election day procedures, newer voting machines, and now, public health procedures at the polls – which typically involves bringing large groups of people together in a single place as well – in a safe manner.

Address all other issues after November if they are not vital to assuring ballots are received by 8 p.m. or to assuring timely election results. Any provision which is not necessary for the November election, particularly if it may delay the legislative process, should be postponed for further consideration. There has already been a considerable amount of uncertainty related to ongoing litigation, and counties and voters need as few changes as possible from this point forward to make sure they can be implemented smoothly. Thus, the current legislative effort should remain focused on this narrow set of issues.

Counties have a significant responsibility in assuring elections remain fair and secure at every step of the process, and we appreciate our strong partnership with the state to meet the needs of Pennsylvania's voters. Ultimately, our goal is to support counties' needs in conducting this general election during this unprecedented situation. This includes providing the safest possible environment for voters, poll workers and county officials while also assuring the integrity and accuracy of every vote in every race.

We look forward to working with the commonwealth to continue to fulfill this responsibility, and the responsibility to protect the health and safety of our residents, as we work through implementing reforms in advance of the 2020 General Election.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We would be pleased to discuss any further questions you may have on election practices and protocols at your convenience.