



# THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



## BOARD OF ELECTIONS:

Josh Maxwell, Chair  
Marian D. Moskowitz, Vice Chair  
Eric M. Roe, Commissioner

## CHESTER COUNTY VOTER SERVICES

Government Services Center  
601 Westtown Road, Suite 150  
P.O. Box 2747  
West Chester, PA 19380-0990  
(610) 344-6410 FAX: (610) 344-5682

Karen Barsoum  
Director

## Written Testify - Senate Democratic Policy Committees

### Mail-In & Absentee Ballot Access

*Topic: Election processes and communication with voters,  
along with ways the Commonwealth can get involved to improve the process.*

**Wednesday, September 25, 2024 | 11:00 AM**

#### WRITTEN REMARKS Committee:

I would like to thank you for inviting Chester County Voter Services to speak on subjects related to administering elections in Pennsylvania. Act 77, Act 12 and Act 88 have provided several amendments to the act of June 3, 1937. There is yet a lot to be done and we're confident that this hearing will contribute to that progress. We are pleased to know that there is an ongoing dialogue and collaboration with the county election directors of Pennsylvania as the outcome from any change in the election code will have to be implemented and administered by them. Any changes that are going to be presented need to be well established under the law and sufficient time needs to be allowed for seamless implementation.

Since the enactment of the no excuse mail-in balloting, voter participation has increased as there are many conveniences to participating via mail-in ballot.

The conveniences for voters are in sharp contrast to the inconveniences it has created for election administrators, especially as the law has not fully adapted to a large mail-in ballot operation. Legislative changes are necessary to keep expectations in line with deliverables. Voters are actively participating via mail-in ballot and do not necessarily understand why the results of this voting method might take longer to tally than voting at the polling places. For example: there are laws in other jurisdictions (states) and national best practices that are allowing for pre-canvassing of mail-in ballots prior to election day. The true challenge for election administrators is perception versus the reality we are operating by in the State of Pennsylvania.

Act 88 provided some well needed funding through the Election Integrity Grant Program for election administration across the state. Chester County has utilized this funding to not just offset the current operational expenses, but to make a commitment to apply a part of the funding to purchase items that improve and strengthen the process from either an operational or security point of view.

The Chester County Voter Service Team is committed to evolving their expertise by participating in professional development. This year alone, the team has participated in various tabletop work sessions that covered subjects from election security, AI challenges, preparedness and self-care

including mental health. With the latest being a very serious subject that should not be overlooked as so many election administrators and staff have faced challenges over the last several years. All these sessions have been collaborations between inter-government departments, inter-county collaboration, and via local, state and federal partners as well as the private sector.

Continued funding is necessary to strengthen election processes in Pennsylvania. The Chester County Voter Services Team has done extensive research, training and inter-governmental collaborative efforts to find the optimal way to deliver and administer elections for our constituents. Process improvements are constantly evaluated and evolving before they are implemented for a subsequent election cycle. We offer a extensive variety of services from a Ballot Services Office, Satellite Offices, Drop Box Program and established a CURE process. In early 2021 we started emphasizing voter education and outreach by attending more community events, creating educational videos with behind-the-scenes footage, updating web content, building social media platforms and creating additional educational handouts.

Chester County truly recognized the extra operational implications that come with mail-in voting and has allocated substantial resources with cross county collaboration to address these needs. From staffing at the central scan operation to election night return for in-person voting, the County has worked hard to ensure the election process is efficient and secure. For 2025, the Board of Commissioners approved both Election Dates to be a County Holiday to enable County staff to assist with the Primary and General elections.

As everything is evolving and more departments are involved in the election operation, creative ideas are developed and put into practice. From providing transportation to the satellite offices to utilizing grant money from other departments to purchase newer technology, every aspect of the election process is reviewed, and all ideas are considered.

As an example, the Drop Box Program that Chester County has implemented is a very impressive and secure operation. Not only are the Drop Boxes staffed when they are open, they have a camera on them 24 hours a day whether or not they are in operation. The cameras have solar panels for continuous charging and footage is instantly captured and collected. The ballot collection staff, who collect the ballots from each Drop Box every day, are also equipped with a body camera which is recording from the moment they first arrive to a Drop Box until all the ballots are delivered to the County's mail-in ballot delivery room which itself is also under 24/7 video surveillance that is live streamed on our website.

Instilling Trust Through Transparency has been very critical over the last few years. Detailed chain of custody protocols, live video surveillance in key areas of the operation, a reconciliation process that far exceeds the election code and full access to logic and accuracy testing and the central scan operation have been implemented by Chester County in the interest of transparency. In addition, we created a poll worker engagement program, and we started the "Tell Us We Care" initiative as part of our continuous improvement efforts.

There are challenges we are facing that could be addressed by updates in the law, and we would strongly encourage all lawmakers to actively engage with election administrators. The election administrators are the subject matter experts that are willing to collaborate and show what impact certain laws will have on the overall election operation and with voter perception statewide.

Again, I would like to thank you for allowing us to be part of this conversation.

*Chester County Voter Services*