

Madame Chair and Members of the Democratic Policy Committee, good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss elections generally and more specifically, mail and absentee balloting in Pennsylvania.

My name is James Allen. I serve as Election Director in Delaware County.

Prior to starting here in March 2021, I served for 14 years, administering paper-ballot elections in Illinois. I decided to come to Pennsylvania for a couple of reasons:

First, Delaware County was much like the state-line county where I grew up in northeastern Illinois. Both Lake County and Delaware County have rich cross sections – of socioeconomics and opinions.

Second, it was an opportunity to help an experienced, capable election team grow accustomed to paper ballots – and more recently, electronic poll books.

In Delaware County, our approach is that we are in the information and education business. If we succeed at those two missions, that will foster understanding and trust in our systems among voters, poll workers, and campaigns.

One area where we seek to inform and educate is mail balloting.

The Department of State and the counties have worked to make the instructions clearer and simpler to follow. We make the signature line easier to recognize as a signature line. We make the date line easier to recognize as a date line. We

employ color to bring attention to those areas. We use color on the secrecy envelope.

Even so, we know some voters will make mistakes. They may fail to use the secrecy envelope. They may fail to date the envelope. Worse yet, they may fail to sign the envelope. The numbers appear to be going down with each election, yet as election administrators, we like to be able to count every eligible ballot from every eligible voter.

Therefore, a concern we have in Delaware County is giving the mail and absentee voters the type of protections we give to our in-person voters – particularly if the voter makes a mistake.

If an Election Day voter arrives at the wrong precinct, we have an Electronic Poll Book to help re-direct that voter. Where we don't have electronic poll books, we have a Voter Registration office the voter can call to find her precinct. If those phone lines are busy, we have a [vote.pa.gov](http://vote.pa.gov) to help the voter find her precinct. Even if none of that is available or it's too late in the day to get to the right precinct, we have a provisional ballot. In sum, we have a belt and three sets of suspenders to help this voter.

Similarly, when we have a voter who makes a mistake on their ID on the application for a mail or absentee ballot, we give them the ability to give us correct ID that can be verified so that their ballot can be counted.

By the same measure, we need to help the mail and absentee voters who return a flawed envelope – one that's unsigned, undated or fails to include the secrecy

envelope. If there's time, we, as election administrators, should be able to call or write or email the voter to let them know about the issue – and what their options are.

We would never turn our backs on the in-person voter who's in the wrong place, or who accidentally signs on the wrong line in the book, or who makes an overvote and needs to spoil a first ballot and vote a new one.

Likewise, in Delaware County we believe that if time permits, we should never turn our backs on voter who makes a mistake such as not signing or not dating their ballot. We have an obligation to all of these voters to try to inform them of how to solve the issue and have their ballot count.

Obviously, there are limits. If a voter arrives in the wrong polling place at 7:55 pm on Election Night, there's little time to do anything other than maybe issue a provisional ballot. Likewise, if a mail ballot envelope arrives unsigned at 7:55 pm on Election Night, there's little we can do to help that voter resolve the issue.

When there is time to educate and inform a voter, we should do so – whether that voter is in a precinct or voting by mail.

Next, I want to address how the mail balloting in Pennsylvania is secure and transparent. IDs are required to be verified. Lists of participation are public long before Election Day. The envelopes have unique correspondence codes. Canceled ballots are not processed. And every step of the process is logged: from the application, to the mailing of the ballot to the voter, to the return of the envelope

to the election authority, and whether that envelope could be opened and the ballot could be counted.

In sum, there is more transparency ahead of Election Day with mail and absentee ballots, which can be tracked starting months before Election Day and then on and through the one or two days that follow. That is far more public transparency than we have in-precinct voters, given that the lists of in-person voters may not be available to campaigns days, even weeks after Election Day.

With that, I would be happy to answer any questions.