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Gov. Wolf Urges Legislature to Pass Proposals for Safe and Secure Elections

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf urged the legislature to quickly pass his plan for safe and secure elections that ensures voters will receive mail-in ballots early, have time to return them, and that counties will have the time they need to quickly count the anticipated historic number of votes cast. The governor also reminded voters that the best way to make sure their vote is counted is to sign up now for a mail-in ballot and return it well before the Nov. 3 election.

"My administration continues to have great confidence in the state's election system," said Gov. Wolf. "Regardless of whether you cast your vote from the convenience of home with a mail-in ballot, or in person on election day, my administration has worked hard to ensure that every person has their voice heard and every vote is counted. These proposed reforms will further strengthen our elections, help people to vote safely from home, and assist counties in processing the surge in mail-in ballots."

The primary in June was the first time that voters could use mail-in ballots after the historic, bipartisan Act 77 of 2019 signed into law by Gov. Wolf last fall. Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly embraced mail-in voting with nearly 1.5 million voters casting a mail-in or absentee ballot, more than half of all votes cast. Despite the record increase in mail-in ballots, and pandemic-related challenges, the primary was administered smoothly with few disruptions.

The Department of State and counties are using experiences from the primary to make improvements for the general election. Many counties, which administer Pennsylvania's elections, are preparing for millions of mail-in ballots by increasing the use of high-speed scanners and other technology to quicken ballot canvassing and vote counting.

In addition, based on experience in the primary, Gov. Wolf called on the legislature to take immediate action on election improvements including:

- Allowing counties to start pre-canvassing ballots 21 days before the election rather than at 7 a.m. election day to make vote counting faster. Pre-canvassing involves counties scanning

and verifying the ballot envelope, matching the voter's signature to voter rolls, opening the mail and secrecy envelopes, and removing and scanning the ballot. Counties would not tabulate or report vote totals until polls close at 8 p.m. on election day.

- Allowing counties to count eligible ballots postmarked by election day and received by the Friday following election day to ensure that all ballots mailed by the deadline are counted.
- Requiring counties to start sending mail-in ballots at least 28 days before the election rather than 14 days as currently required. The change ensures voters who apply early will have at least four weeks to receive and return their ballot.
- Providing counties flexibility to appoint poll workers to vacant positions earlier than five days before an election. More poll workers are still needed, and the Department of State is encouraging businesses, colleges and organizations to reach out to their county elections office and volunteer at their local precincts.

The governor made the announcement during a news conference at Ridgeway Community Church, which serves as a polling place in Dauphin County. The governor was joined by Centre County Commissioner Chair Michael Pipe.

"If you want to vote by mail, apply now and your county will send you a ballot as soon as it is finalized," said Gov. Wolf. "When you receive your ballot, complete it and mail it back as soon as you can so your county gets it in plenty of time."

The Department of State soon will launch a public awareness campaign to inform voters how to apply for a mail-in ballot and will partner with the Pittsburgh Penguins and Allegheny County on voting initiatives.

Eligible voters may apply for their mail-in or absentee ballot online at votespa.com, in person at their county election offices, or by paper forms submitted by mail. Once the county determines the voter is eligible, counties will send the voter a ballot with return postage paid by the Department of State, so casting a ballot is free to voters. Voters have several convenient options to return their ballot by mail, in person at their county election office or at drop boxes, which many counties expect to provide.

Voters may register to vote and apply for their mail-in or absentee ballot online, in person at their county election offices, or by paper forms submitted by mail. The voter registration deadline for the Nov. 3 general election is Oct. 19. The deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot is Oct. 27. Online application for mail-in and absentee ballots are available in Spanish.

Pennsylvania is not automatically sending ballots to voters.

For voters who prefer to vote in person, polling places will be available in all counties on election day, Nov. 3, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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