

COMMON CAUSE PENNSYLVANIA TESTIMONY: HB1300

House State Government Committee

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Chairman Grove, Chairwoman Davidson and members of the House State Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony here today. As we've heard repeated over and over again in the 10 hearings we've had just in this chamber, elections are the cornerstone of our democracy. Together we've sat through those 10 hearings, totaling over 50 hours, discussing a myriad of election code reforms. We've even had the opportunity to [testify](#). In that testimony we lifted up an element of democracy that is the foundation of our organization's existence. **Elections are not a partisan issue; they are a people issue. Our government 'by the people' is stronger when more people participate in it.**

Unfortunately, House Bill 1300 (HB1300) fails to meet this ideal and for that reason, among several others we'll list here, **Common Cause Pennsylvania adamantly opposes this legislation.**

Common Cause Pennsylvania is a nonpartisan good government organization dedicated to holding power accountable to the people, representing over 34,000 members across all 67 counties in this great Commonwealth.

We understand the importance of this moment. Despite incredible challenges, a global pandemic, limited staff and funding, [we saw a record number of Pennsylvanians participate](#) in our democracy and cast our ballots. Whether it was at our kitchen table, at a satellite elections office or at our local polling place, Pennsylvanians made our voices heard.

This was made possible by the passage of Act 77 and Act 12. We know that the General Assembly can come together and pass legislation that will increase voter access because you've done it before. HB1300 falls far short of that mark.

This bill has been presented to the media and the public as a "Comprehensive Voting Rights Protection Bill to Increase Voter Access" and we're here to tell you **this bill is nothing more than a wolf in sheep's clothing.**

HB1300 in its current form places restrictions on multiple levels of the voting process that millions of Pennsylvanians have come to depend on. Specifically, this bill:

1) **Limits the use of dropboxes.**

Dropboxes are a safe, secure, and convenient option for voters casting their ballot by mail. This legislation limits the use of this option to only 7 days prior to the election and prescribes the hours when the dropbox is open, while also requiring two partisan "inspectors" to verify the identification of each

individual returning their ballot while also examining the ballot envelope itself. These limitations are unacceptable and severely diminish the accessibility for voters.

2) Limits the functions of Satellite Elections Offices (SEO's).

This legislation has eliminated the ability of a voter to apply for and receive an absentee/mail-ballot and vote it immediately at both SEO's and the county election office, crippling a popular voting method for voters across the state and inherently rendering SEO's useless. This bill also turns each ballot return location and satellite elections office into a "polling place" meaning that they must also allow for the access of observers in accordance with other provisions of the election code, so potentially multiple people can surround the dropbox location or SEO at any time.

3) Creates burdensome Voter ID requirements.

There is no way around it - requiring voter ID to cast a ballot makes it more difficult for voters, particularly those voters who have been traditionally disenfranchised, to vote. Forcing people to produce specific ID's to participate in their democracy limits their access to that democracy. HB 1300 increases voter ID requirements in two distinct, but equally unacceptable ways. First, this bill requires ID to be presented each and every time we vote in person at a polling place, regardless of whether it is our first time voting in that precinct, while also changing the types of identification that will be accepted. While there is a provision for voters to complete an affidavit attesting to their identity, this is also a burdensome requirement that threatens to increase wait times for voters. HB 1300 also increases the ID required to vote-by-mail. Under this legislation, voters would be required to use 2 of 3 different methods of ID, previously only one form was required. When going to apply for vote-by-mail voters will now have to produce 2 of the following 3 methods of ID:

- a. Driver's License Number
- b. Last 4 digits of their Social Security Number
- c. Elector's Voter Registration Number

So, while people going to the polls now require one ID every time they vote, voters wishing to vote-by-mail are disenfranchised by being forced to require 2 forms. That is unacceptable.

4) Requires Signature Verification with no training or standard practices.

This bill requires the use of an automated sorting or exacting machine that also must possess the capability of a signature verification device. We know that signature verification is not an exact science, that is why the state of Colorado, which we heard from in this hearing process, requires extensive training to compare signatures. This law falls short of that requirement and also allows only a small window of 5 days for voters to validate their signature if it is found to "not match" the signature on file. The support structures needed to use this practice effectively are not found in this bill.

5) Moves election audit responsibility from the Department of State to the Office of the Auditor General.

This bill creates several election related audits required by the Counties to the Office of the Auditor General, a partisan elected statewide with zero experience in administering or running elections. While we are encouraged to see the use of a Risk-Limiting Audit, the rest of the wide-reaching procedural audits required are troubling. Audits in the context of elections are typically understood to mean tabulation audits, and these procedural audits, while also being unprecedented in the audit community and guidelines, are a solution in search of a problem that has been proven multiple times do not exist. They did not exist in the 2020 election and do not exist now.



6) Moves the deadline of both registering to vote and apply for vote-by-mail.

Act 77 historically shifted our voter registration deadline from one of the most restrictive in the country at 30 days prior to election day, to the middle of the pack at 15 days prior to election day. Reverting back to this early deadline is a costly mistake to the voters of Pennsylvania. Our colleagues at Keystone Votes reported, “In 2020, within the 15-day period that this bill would cut, there were 12,755 Democrats and 18,583 Republicans who registered for the first time.” Tens of thousands of voters in Pennsylvania would be disenfranchised with this deadline change, as well as the change to move the vote-by-mail application back from 7 days prior to election day to 15 days prior. While we understand the pressure the counties are under to provide turnarounds in this time, slashing the ability for people to register and apply to vote is not the solution.

While we acknowledge that this bill does provide some administrative support to our amazing county election workers and administrators in the form of allowing 5 days of prec canvassing with the opportunity to cure, requiring the implementation of electronic pollbooks, delaying the implementation of early voting to 2025, and providing more money for our extraordinary poll workers and election officials, the good does not come close to outweighing the bad for democracy in our Commonwealth.

We can and must support our elections officials and listen to our voters. It is not an either-or scenario; we can assist both and make changes that matter.

There is no justification for the disenfranchisement of Pennsylvania’s voters. This committee took 6 months to hold 10 election integrity hearings and countless committee hearings to provide this 149-page bill. Now this bill, which was introduced last Thursday, is being voted out of committee only 6 days later? That timeline is unacceptable.

Act 77 and Act 12 provided Pennsylvania voters with the freedom to choose how to participate in our own government for the first time in decades. Those pieces of legislation showed that a government ‘for the people’ can come together in a bipartisan fashion and increase voter access. It is in this aspect, among the others listed, that HB1300 falls far short.

Public confidence in our government is more important now than it has ever been. **We need the people to trust their government, not the government questioning if they can trust their people.** We are seeing more Pennsylvania voters engaged than ever before. We must meet this moment not by erecting barriers to casting a ballot, but by passing legislation that ensures that voting is safe, secure, and accessible for all Pennsylvanians. This bill moves our Commonwealth in the wrong direction.

Common Cause urges a “No” vote on HB 1300 in the strongest terms.

Thank you.