

TESTIMONY OF KHALIF ALI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMON CAUSE PENNSYLVANIA

to the Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee

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Our government ‘by the people’ is stronger when more people can participate by voting. And it’s more representative when voters can freely cast their ballots – regardless of their economic circumstances, family responsibilities or zip code.

But hyperpartisanship and disinformation – and greed – are moving our country away from that ideal. Denying the 2020 election results is financially and politically [profitable](#): private individuals have been [raising money](#) for themselves on crowd-funding websites, using doubts about the 2020 elections as the fundraising hook. Political candidates who deny the 2020 election results are [raising money](#) at a record-breaking clip. Our former president raised [a quarter-billion dollars](#) – with a “b” – in just two months, promising to overturn the election results. And we should all be concerned that nonprofits are raising [millions of dollars](#) in dark money by casting doubt on the election.

One of the latest theories is that somehow, ballot dropboxes were misused in the 2020 election. **Here’s the facts:** dropboxes were available to voters [in about 40 states](#) – and were used by [millions of voters](#), including [about 37% of Trump voters](#) who cast mail ballots. For voters with [concerns about the US Postal Service](#), they are a trusted and reliable way to return voted ballots. And their popularity with voters crosses all partisan lines: elections clerks in Utah reported that in 2020, 60% of their voters returned ballots via dropboxes.

Yet, in the wake of the 2020 election, there are people making money by casting doubt on dropboxes. Dinesh D’Souza, who was pardoned by our former president [after he pleaded guilty](#) to making illegal campaign donations, is making a cottage industry out of it. This fall, D’Souza will be selling his new book on the subject for [\\$26.99 per copy](#) – and he reportedly has a movie coming out soon, in partnership with True the Vote.

We have concerns about the integrity and intent of True the Vote. True the Vote is on a bit of a road trip these days. They were in Wisconsin last Friday, with their cellphone data, testifying at a committee hearing much like this one. But there’s a logic gap between observing that cellphones were ‘in the vicinity’ of dropboxes and the group’s allegations of malfeasance. People live *and work* ‘in the vicinity’ of dropboxes. In particular, elections workers retrieving ballots from the dropboxes are going to make repeated trips to the dropboxes – and modern life being what it is, they probably bring their cellphones with them. According to [press reports](#) in Wisconsin, True the Vote refused “to provide the detailed evidence supporting” their claims.

True the Vote tried this theory out in Georgia, last year, but were [rebuffed by the Georgia Bureau of Investigations](#). “What has not been provided is any other kind of evidence that ties these cell phones to

ballot harvesting; for example, there are no statements of witnesses and no names of any potential defendants to interview,” GBI Director D. Victor Reynolds [told the group](#). “Saliently, it has been stated that there is ‘a source’ that can validate ballot harvesting. Despite repeated requests that source has not been provided to either the GBI or to the FBI.”

Now True the Vote is here in Pennsylvania, peddling the same allegations. On Tuesday, True the Vote’s Gregg Phillips ‘testified’ about ballot dropboxes to the Senate State Government Committee. Mr. Phillips has a long history of casting doubt on our elections: [TIME magazine](#) describes him as ‘the Man Who May Have Convinced President Trump Voter Fraud Exists.’

True the Vote has a history of casting doubt on elections as a way to fundraise, going back to [the 2016 election cycle](#). They’ve even been [sued by a donor](#) who ‘came to regret his donation and to doubt conspiracy theories of rampant illegal voting.’

True the Vote, based on the facts listed, has very little, if any credibility in the voting and elections space. So, we (Common Cause and members) are deeply troubled by not one, but two, Pennsylvania Senate committees willing to give them airtime to spread their unproven allegations.

Conspiracy theories may be like catnip, for those who want to doubt the results of the 2020 election – but they are doing real damage to voters’ confidence in our government.

All around the country, state legislatures have been trying to placate election-deniers – but, like any conspiracy theory, the goal posts keep moving.

Last year, at least [19 states passed laws](#) restricting access to voting – and this year, the Voting Rights Lab is tracking [another 561 bills](#) that would restrict voter access or election administration. The goal posts keep moving – further and further away from the ideal of a government ‘by the people’ that *all* the people can participate in.

Because of this specific conspiracy theory, we’re seeing a lot of legislative proposals to make it harder to use, or even eliminate, dropboxes – despite their popularity. (The *Pocono Record* surveyed its readers – and they [unanimously supported](#) ballot dropboxes.)

These proposals make for loud headlines for the people pushing them – and headlines can help with fundraising, and they can help sell things – but in the end, all these proposals do is limit voters’ options, make it harder for us to cast our ballots, and undermine everyone’s confidence in our elections.

It’s unfortunate that the hearing for [SB 878](#) was overshadowed by the dropbox drama. There are things in it – like pre-canvassing of ballots – that would be positive steps and are urgently needed by Pennsylvania elections officials.

And it’s unfortunate that our Senate Intergovernmental Operations Committee is spending time and resources on this, today. There are so many *other* things that Pennsylvania voters are concerned about – continuing access to telehealth services, help with housing needs, the economy and better jobs. *These* are the things that our elected officials should be focused on, not trying to overturn the voters’ choice in the 2020 election.

Common Cause Pennsylvania is not opposed to people or organizations expressing concern about any process that’s a part of our democracy. However, we don’t believe that eliminating a process – such as dropboxes, that have served the needs of voters across the political spectrum in Pennsylvania – is the

solution. Democracy is a political system that relies on the people's confidence and participation. Using untested data collection and analysis to call into question drop boxes diminishes confidence in that process and could potentially limit overall participation.

Considering that this Committee's chair, Senator Chris Dush, was present at Tuesday's hearing, it's reasonable to assume that the information shared at the State Government Committee will be repeated today. We respectfully request that this committee take the necessary step of collecting testimony and data from *multiple* subject matter experts and sources, and then carefully weigh that information before using it as a basis for improving dropboxes and voting in Pennsylvania.

