



2021 Senate Special Committee on Election Integrity & Reform Hearing,

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**Testimony of Acting Secretary Veronica Degraffenreid
Pennsylvania Department of State**

Act 77 Implementation

Chairman Langerholc, Chairman Street and members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. Thank you for your invitation to appear before the Committee to discuss the Department of State's implementation of Act 77. Joining me today is Deputy Secretary for Elections and Commissions Jonathan Marks.

Act 77, the bipartisan election reform law signed by Governor Wolf in 2019, has ushered in an exciting new era of voting modernization in Pennsylvania and made voting easier and more accessible to millions of Pennsylvanians. Act 77 was a sea change in how Pennsylvanians vote, allowing eligible voters to cast their ballot by mail without requiring an excuse, and implementing other flexible options including same day in-person ballot requests at County Election Offices. Voters also now have the option to be placed on a list to annually receive a mail ballot application.

These changes proved to be extraordinarily prescient, given developments in 2020. Just months after the passage of Act 77, the first novel coronavirus cases were detected in Pennsylvania, and the ability to use mail-in ballots helped protect Pennsylvania voters in both the Primary and General Elections.

In addition, Act 77 authorized \$90 million in funding to reimburse counties for costs to upgrade their existing voting systems. The new systems, which were implemented in every county ahead of the 2020 election, provided enhanced security to help guard against hacking and produce an anonymous paper record so voters can verify their ballot is correctly marked when casting it. To date, \$41.6 million in reimbursements have been provided to county election offices towards this endeavor.

Prior to passage of this historic law, the Department of State launched its Ready to Vote campaign in early fall 2019 to inform Pennsylvanians about new voting systems. When Act 77 became law, Ready to Vote quickly expanded to include educating voters on election changes, such as voting by mail without an excuse and new deadlines.

The cornerstone of Ready to Vote was a year-long, multi-lingual, multi-platform advertising and messaging campaign. Department of State staff engaged counties, other commonwealth agencies and community stakeholders to help educate voters, holding more than 70 speaking engagements throughout the year and providing an online toolkit with messaging that included signage, social media posts, graphics and more. The department also worked to make voting more accessible by providing mail-in ballot forms in multiple languages, launching an accessible vote-by-mail solution for voters with disabilities, and providing postage on envelopes so that voters could return their mail ballots for free, among other projects. In addition, between April and November 2020, our staff answered 123,000 phone calls to our election hotline.

The success of Act 77 is clear from the record-high voter engagement we saw in 2020 across all areas of the Commonwealth. By the November general election, approximately 9.1 million Pennsylvanians were registered to vote, more than 300,000

more voters than ever before. Turnout in the November election included more than 6.9 million voters - 800,000 more Pennsylvanians than ever in the Commonwealth's history. Over 76 percent of registered Pennsylvania voters voted, more than any election in modern history. Pennsylvania voters have embraced the ease and convenience of voting by mail without having to provide an excuse. Thanks to the dedication of county election officials across the Commonwealth, all Pennsylvania voters can cast their ballots with confidence that their votes will be counted accurately and securely and that their voices will be heard. I look forward to working with you in the coming year to build upon last year's successes as vote-by-mail and other provisions of Act 77 continue to be implemented.

Thank you for your time and attention and the opportunity to appear before you.