



LAMONT G. MCCLURE
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE

COUNTY OF NORTHAMPTON

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
669 WASHINGTON STREET
EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18042
Phone: 610-829-6300
Fax: 610-559-3722
Email: LMcClure@northamptoncounty.org

March 23, 2021

Senator Wayne Langerholc Jr.
Senate of Pennsylvania
Special Committee on Election Integrity and Reform

Good morning to Senator Langerholc Jr. and distinguished members of the committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Lamont McClure and I am the County Executive of the County of Northampton. Before attaining my current position, I served on the Northampton County Council for almost a decade.

The responsibility of running elections has always fallen on the shoulders of county government and it is a heavy responsibility. Voting is the cornerstone of every democracy and there is no room for error. Casting a ballot must be accessible to every eligible citizen and the process must be secure from registering to vote to the certification of the final results. The method of counting ballots must be reliable, the final tally incontestable and the entire process open to examination by the public. Plus you have to find a way to pay for it all.

Our bedrock principle in Northampton County is to put on fair, legal and accurate elections, and that's what we did in 2020. Northampton is recognized not only a bellwether of the Commonwealth, but also of the nation. Over the past one hundred years, Northampton County has differed from the national result in a presidential election only three times.

In Northampton County, we know a little something about election stress tests. Pursuant to the Commonwealth's settlement of the *Stein* case, Northampton County purchased the ES&S ExpressVote XL, a state-of-the-art touchscreen system with a paper ballot backup. In the context of election security, this was light years ahead of the DREs we had previously used. We were excited about this upgrade and paid \$2.9 million dollars believing that not only would our election security be enhanced, but the experience would be better for the voter. During our election in November 2019 it quickly became clear that something was not right. By the end of the day, we learned of not just one, but two distinct problems which imperiled the entire outcome of the election.

Throughout the day we had fielded reports of touchscreens that were “glitchy,” particularly in the margins. What we subsequently learned was that approximately 1/3 of the machines we’d purchased had not been properly calibrated at the factory before ES&S shipped them to us. Despite these worrisome reports we were heartened to discover that, when questioned about whether their selections had showed up on the paper ballot, voter after voter indicated that they had. It may have taken a few extra taps on the touchscreen but, once they finalized their selections and hit print, the names of their chosen candidates were printed out on a paper ballot that they could review.

After 8:00PM that night, I got a call that no County Executive wants to receive. An additional factory error, initiated by ES&S mis-coding caused the votes for cross-filed races to fail to be tallied on the XL’s memory stick. Using the computer results became impossible. Instead, we would have to count the paper ballots. And, we did. All night long. Using high speed scanners we counted over 60,000 ballots and, by 5AM the next morning we had results. And, while this was not our preferred method of conducting an election, we learned a very important lesson—the paper ballot backup works. Ahead of what was likely to result in unprecedented turnout in a presidential year, if the voting machines failed, the paper ballot backup would allow us to put on a fair, legal and accurate election.

(I’m happy to report that ES&S quickly investigated the matter, made the requisite fixes and we went through a very busy 2020 without a glitch.)

After our harrowing experience, Governor Wolf signed Act 77 tasking election officials with essentially implementing two voting systems—one at the polls and one by no-excuse mail-in ballots. The General Election in 2020 required nearly 1500 people to handle both systems. Our County Council added another million dollars to our election’s budget to ensure there were enough resources. Because of the dedication of our staff and volunteers and the willingness of Council to provide additional funding, I’m happy to report our Primary and General Elections were virtually flawless. During the Primary of 2020 we were one of the first three counties in the Commonwealth to report our results. In November, we were the first to report our 2020 General Election results, posting them at approximately 6:00AM Wednesday morning.

I understand that Act 77 has come under intense and withering criticism from virtually all quarters. Some the concerns are valid such as the increased volume of work the new law has imposed on Registrars across the Commonwealth. Others are nothing more than conspiracy theories. Are there aspects of the law that can be improved? I think the answer to that question is, yes. However, it is the view of Northampton County that the Legislature should be commended for Act 77. It is the most democratizing piece of legislation in the history of the Commonwealth, and it is a statute its drafters and all those who voted for it can be deeply proud of upon reflection.

Registrars across the state want to put on fair, legal and accurate elections, but they need your assistance. It is not feasible for them to conduct two separate elections on the same day. Allowing twenty-one days to pre-canvass mail-in ballots would give them more time. Permitting ballots to be mailed out twenty-eight days before an election instead of fourteen would be beneficial for both staff and voters. Sending an application to vote by mail to every voter has been shown to increase participation.

Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. For our citizens to have confidence in the process we must increase accessibility and participation for voters and we must give our Registrars the tools and the space they need to do their work. As we saw in 2020, delays in reporting results can be weaponized and used to form conspiracy theories. As public servants, we serve the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I encourage the committee to not go backwards on Act 77, but to improve it.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lamont G. McClure

LGM/bb