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County of Berks – Press Release

County of Berks supports quick action amidst election uncertainty in Pennsylvania

Reading, PA— 03/09/2022 — The Berks County Commissioners are [joining County Commissioners throughout the state](#) to ask the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to take swift action on the appeal to the state’s legislative maps to give counties clear and final guidance and deadlines to properly prepare for the May Primary. With so much uncertainty surrounding crucial election items, it is increasingly difficult for counties and election offices to complete the tasks necessary to run an election.

“The longer it takes for the Court to provide a final decision, the harder it becomes for counties to meet the various deadlines for the May primary,” said Kevin Barnhardt, Commissioner and Chair of the Election Board. “Our Election Services staff does an incredible job each year to run fair and successful elections, but they need clear guidance and a reasonable amount of time in order to pull off such an enormous feat.”

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court on Monday regarding the appeals to the legislative reapportionment maps. In the brief, CCAP asked the Court to expedite its decision in the case and any decisions to adjust the 2022 primary election calendar. If the primary election calendar is changed, CCAP asked the Court to set a schedule that allows county boards of elections a reasonable amount of time to prepare ballots, program voting machines and complete other tasks imposed by the Election Code.

“This is not about taking a position on the merits of the case being considered, but a reminder that these cases, and any changes that emerge from them, have a direct impact on our ability to properly do our job,” Commissioner Michael Rivera said. “Late decisions and indecision will force counties across the state to further stretch their resources and staff during an already demanding election process.”

Many pre-election tasks can only occur after the filing of nomination petitions. As it stands, the deadline for circulating nomination petitions for State Committees and for seats in the PA General Assembly is suspended pursuant to various Court orders. County boards of elections cannot begin preparing paper ballots or programming election machines until nomination petitions have been circulated and filed, objections have been adjudicated and the Secretary of the Commonwealth has provided a list to each county of the candidates to appear on the ballots. With the election set for May 17, statutory deadlines for these tasks are rapidly approaching.

While the Court may consider changing the primary election calendar, the Commissioners are strongly against the idea of holding two primary elections. Holding a second primary election would create a considerable additional cost to rent polling places, print a second ballot, and program voting equipment and the already difficult task of securing poll workers and Election Day volunteers. Finally, it would further strain the elections staff to conduct a second primary election while already busy completing the canvass and certification of the first one and preparing for the general election.

“In the end, what is taking place in the courts affects election integrity,” Commissioners Chair Christian Leinbach said. “The uncertainty and confusion created by these legal delays does not help bolster voter confidence in the electoral process. We are hopeful that the Court will understand the significant challenges counties and election staffs are facing and rule expediently so that these processes can move forward. Regardless of the final outcome, the Berks County Office of Election Services will do everything necessary to ensure a fair and free election for our voters.”

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