

To Hon. Kathy Boockvar
Secretary of the Commonwealth
302 North Office Building
401 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

June 2020

Dear Secretary Boockvar,

Penn Leads the Vote (PLTV) is a nonpartisan student-led organization at the University of Pennsylvania dedicated to increasing civic engagement and voter turnout across the student body. Since being reestablished in 2018, we have engaged Penn's campus around current issues and elections on the local, state, and national level. In addition to direct engagement with students, we have built diverse coalitions at the student and institutional level to ensure that democratic engagement becomes an integral part of campus life.

Although student voter turnout still trails behind the national average, we have made significant strides in recent elections. For example, Penn's voter turnout grew by 28.7 points in the 2018 Midterm Elections compared to 2014. In the May 2019 primary, PLTV led the school's first absentee ballot initiative, resulting in approximately 100 votes by absentee ballot when the previous record had been two. This past fall, PLTV increased the in-person voter turnout by 400% in our local election. These outcomes are a few of the many prime examples of PLTV's commitment to ensuring that all students have the resources to make their voices heard at the ballot box.

We recognize that our work alone could not achieve our goal of 100% voter turnout on Penn's campus, which is why we have been so grateful for the work that the Commonwealth has done to increase access to voting. Most importantly, the passage of Act 77 last fall was a milestone in terms of making voting more accessible and secure for all residents, including students. Especially during times such as this spring when students will not be able to vote on-campus, these election reforms are crucial. Allowing for no-excuse mail-in voting and extending the deadlines will ensure that students are given ample access to the ballot this June.

We also appreciate the work that legislators have done to build upon the advancements of Act 77. State Representative Kevin Boyle (D-Philadelphia/Montgomery) recently proposed HB 2367, which would provide \$40 million for printing and postage costs related to voting in the June 2nd Primary and November 3rd General. This would ensure that financial burdens do not prevent Pennsylvanians from being able to vote in the upcoming elections. This additional election reform will only further increase the ability for Pennsylvanians, including students, to make their voices heard at the polls. We hope that this legislation will pass and we will continue to have champions such as Representative Boyle in the PA Government to introduce these initiatives.

Act 77 and the further election reforms that have been introduced are tremendously important for supporting the work that PLTV does to increase voter access and engagement. With these reforms, we know that a greater number of students both at Penn and across the commonwealth will be able to participate in our democracy. We believe that continuing to build upon the improvements that recent reforms have made remains critical to empowering voters across the state. Therefore, we have supplemental proposals that we would like to present to you that would further strengthen the voting process for Pennsylvanians, including students.

Through personal experience and discussions with other universities and student groups on Penn's campus, we have developed a list of proposals that we would love to get your insight into. While most of these require legislative reform or local action, we would love to discuss how best to advocate for these additional reforms.

Our first recommendation is to implement an eSignature feature to the online voter registration form, which will allow a greater number of registrations to be processed by updating the current form. Students at Penn from all political beliefs support this implementation and understand that the potential disenfranchisement from the current outdated system is far more dangerous to our society than the potential for fraud.

Our second recommendation is to allow individuals to request an absentee ballot or mail-in ballot online using the last four digits of their Social Security Number, as is required for paper requests, instead of limiting it to those with a PennDOT ID. This reform will greatly increase access for out-of-state students to vote, especially in the upcoming elections.

Our third recommendation is to eliminate all stamp requirements for voting-related materials. All mailed-in forms currently require stamps, requiring individuals to pay to exercise their right to vote. As previously indicated, current legislative proposals exist in the State House to address this for the short term. Seeing action on this legislation and expanding it to all future elections would be a great example of electoral reform that would increase voter accessibility.

Our fourth recommendation is to move all primary election dates to April, as the presidential primary currently is. This would allow all students the opportunity to vote in-person and increase access to the ballot, as college students are no longer on-campus in May. We also think that implementing early-voting dates statewide, which would allow students the opportunity to vote while they are still on-campus without moving the date entirely.

Our fifth recommendation regards the absentee ballot process, and the need to streamline the process through which individuals can vote by mail. With the introduction of a mail-in option through Act 77, we encourage the elimination of the absentee ballot all together. Moving towards one, streamlined, vote-by-mail option will reduce confusion and allow everyone to vote regardless of their reason.

We hope that this will only encourage Governor Wolf's office and state legislators to take further action to protect and promote the right to vote in Pennsylvania. We would love the opportunity to meet in

person once the world returns to some sense of normalcy and discuss how the Commonwealth can implement additional policies to improve student voting. We hope to also learn about some ideas for election reform from the Governor's office that we can garner additional student support from through our coalitions. We have developed partnerships with students at Penn and other universities in order to build a diverse coalition of support for these initiatives. We would love to bring any ideas from the Secretary of State's office to our partners and spur action around these initiatives to further electoral reform.

Sincerely,

Harrison Feinman
Director of Penn Leads the Vote

Eva Gonzalez
Director of Penn Leads the Vote