

LANCASTER COUNTY ELECTION BOARD MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2022

The Board of Elections met today for an Election Board Meeting.

Present at today's meeting:

Ray D'Agostino, Chairman
Joshua G. Parsons, Vice-Chairman
John B. Trescot
BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Also present:

Christa Miller, Chief Clerk/Registrar
BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Rosa Nolt, Resident
LANCASTER COUNTY

Hilda Sierra-Marrero, Resident
LANCASTER CITY

Commissioner D'Agostino called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

Commissioner D'Agostino announced the approval of the February 9, 2022, Election Board meeting minutes and the March 2, 2022, Election Board meeting minutes

Update on the 2022 Primary Election

Christa Miller, Chief Clerk/Registrar, Board of Elections

Ms. Miller did not have an update on the reapportionment and the maps that they were hoping for. As of this morning, there are no final maps for the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the State Committee people, and there is no election calendar as to when they can start petitions. Also, no final decision has been given on the Act 77 case.

Ms. Miller stated they currently have 345,232 voters registered in Lancaster County, and they have 16,958 mail-in/absentee ballot requests for the spring primary.

For the statewide, congressional, and local committee people, the Voter Registration/Elections office received 512 petitions, 452 of which had come in the last two days. Casting of lots for 24 of the positions for the local committee people will be on Friday at noon in room 102.

There were 58 candidates who filed nomination petitions for the U.S. Congress (only two in the 11th District); 12 candidates filed nomination petitions for U.S. Senate; 11 candidates files nomination petitions for Governor, and 12 candidates filed nomination petitions for Lieutenant Governor.

The objection period opens today and closes on Tuesday, March 22, 2022. Any court cases that arise from the objections must be decided on by Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

Commissioner D'Agostino asked Ms. Miller how her office is dealing with the uncertainty with the State House maps and petition period. Ms. Miller stated they are receiving phone calls every day from people asking for new maps, walking lists, etc. Her office has a consistent answer – that they are still waiting on answers from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and asking them to contact the Department of State if they have any additional questions.

Commissioner D'Agostino asked Ms. Miller to briefly talk about what it means to put a District together, for the purposes of elections. Ms. Miller explained that her staff would have to go into the SURE system, pull up the entire district and change either the House or the Senate district that they are in. They will have about 200 districts that they have to change between the House and the Senate. This will take them a little while, which is why they will have two people working on it. Their goal is to have that done in one business day.

Commissioner Parsons thanked Ms. Miller and her staff for their work and flexibility, and for trying to stay on top of things. Commissioner Parsons expressed, again, how incredibly frustrating it is to have no settled election law; to have no settled election districts; to have two petition periods, which he thinks is unprecedented and is confusing to people. He stated this is unacceptable and embarrassing for Pennsylvania to be in this place. This was Commissioner Parsons' problem since 2019 with Act 77 – it did not have clear, simple, black and white rules, and because of that, people lose faith in the system.

For clarification purposes, Commissioner Parsons explained what Casting of Lots means – it is deciding whose name is going to be listed first and whose name is going to be listed second when there are two or more people who have filed petitions to get on the ballot for a position. In a General Election, that is determined by the law, and the law says that whichever party holds the Governor's office, they are listed first; however, in a Primary Election, there is no such determination because it is all interparty, so they must cast lots. If the person that filed a petition to be, for example a committee person, they are welcome to come in to draw the ball out, if not, the Board of Elections will do it for them. Commissioner Parsons also mentioned the drop box, which was for the ease of staff, so that people who wanted to bring their ballots into the Voter Registration/Elections office, rather than mailing it in, did not have to walk through the sheriff's security and all the way into the Voter Registration/Elections office. The box was placed by the Sheriff's and was always monitored with a video camera. His concern is the fact that, when Act 77 was passed, people did not know that they were not allowed to bring their spouses or other people's ballot in. That is ballot harvesting, which is illegal. The Commissioners have been trying to get that message out so that no one would get in trouble because they do not know the law.

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Commissioner Parsons said that in the last election, the governor himself admitted on the radio to ballot harvesting with his wife; however, he did not suffer any consequences because of that. Commissioner Parsons does not want to see people bring someone else's ballot in because the governor admitted to doing so. He is leaning towards removing the box for this election and having people bring the ballots to the Voter Registration/Elections office, if they do not want to mail them.

Commissioner D'Agostino said that having a surveillance camera monitoring drop boxes did not stop people from ballot harvesting. Some of those videos are floating around on the internet, which does not give people a lot of faith and integrity in the system. Commissioner D'Agostino is hopeful that the State Supreme Court will uphold the Commonwealth Court's decision regarding Act 77, and even if they did uphold it, it will likely stay in place at least through the May 17 Primary Election. Commissioner D'Agostino stated the Board of Elections needs to do everything they can to make sure that we have integrity throughout the entire process.

Commissioner Trescot said that having a legislature that was able to pass the law to get Lancaster County to move from Class 3 to Class 2A in a few days, but not being able to get the legislature to pass something that every county's election clerk is supporting, seems odd.

Regarding the drop box, Commissioner Trescot said that what they are doing by having a drop box outside the Voter Registration/Elections office that has a video surveillance and sheriffs around it, is trying to make sure that people who are not willing to spend 58 cents to mail their ballot are monitored well, because if they were willing to spend 58 cents, they could go to a blue mailbox to drop their ballot, so that seems like a lot of effort for protecting that 58 cents. Commissioner Trescot supports having a drop box because it is convenient for people.

Commissioner Trescot mentioned another aspect on why Lancaster County is in this situation of waiting for approval of maps. He stated that in all the places around the country that had non-partisan redistricting panels, where politics do not get into it, they were all able to pass their maps on time, and the fact that we do not, shows that we continue to keep it as a very partisan issue. Commissioner Trescot recommends they look at it and try to get the local legislature to get that out of committee so that people could vote on having a non-partisan panel.

Commissioner Parsons agreed that there is a problem with the law, which makes the elections less secure and we do not know what people do at the mailboxes, but what we can do is control what we can control. He stated there were many people who did not know that they could not give their ballot to their spouse, but we know for a fact that the Governor went on the radio and said that he and his wife vote harvested, and that is illegal. When people are conducting illegal activities and no one is enforcing the law, it tends to undermine the idea of election security. Commissioner Parsons said all we can do is make our election as secure as we can under the existing law.

Commissioner D'Agostino asked Ms. Miller to give an update on the Judges of Election and how they are getting ready for the primary. Ms. Miller stated they will have their trainings for the Judges the first week of April. They have over 100 new judges and inspectors for this election, and they also have machine testing coming up.

The Commissioners addressed questions raised by members of the public.

On motion of Commissioner Trescot, seconded by Commissioner Parsons, the meeting adjourned at 9:42 a.m.

Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Lydia Kovalchuk, Executive Assistant
Commissioners' Office