

Dear Members of the Senate State Government Committee,

I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 416, and respectfully request that this letter be part of the official record for the Senate State Government Committee public hearing on election law legislation.

The sponsors of election law bills are often well meaning. But from my perspective, only bills that do not limit voter access, do not create partisan advantage and do not create security risk should merit consideration. Unfortunately, the provisions in Senate Bill 416 do not meet these criteria.

The main provisions in Senate Bill 416 authorize vote centers and curbside voting; both provisions are troublesome. Vote centers particularly so, because they have the potential to be used for partisan advantage, and curbside voting creates security risks by allowing ballots to be removed from polling locations during an election. Curbside voting also circumvents the practice of matching signatures to identify voters.

As drafted, vote centers could be created to cross district and municipal boundaries. In my opinion, voters should never be asked or required to vote outside their district or municipality. More concerning is that the process of locating vote centers is open to political manipulation. In the age of micro-targeting, it is easy to see how some might eliminate existing polling locations, and then geographically locate a vote center to boost or suppress voter turnout for partisan advantage. Finally, vote centers also have the potential to negatively impact access for disadvantaged and rural voters.

Some have complained about the cost of equipping small municipalities for elections. I share this concern, but vote centers are not the answer. The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) has endorsed a limited mail-in ballot proposal as an option to address this concern.

Another concern, cited by vote center proponents, is the inability to find accessible polling locations. Again, I share this concern, but vote centers and curbside voting are not the answer. No fault absentee ballot voting would help address this access concern, without the risk of vote centers and without the security risk of curbside voting.

Another complaint is the difficulty of staffing polling locations on election day. To that point, I would offer that current state law allows for counties to realign voting district boundaries. A few years ago, Lancaster County implemented a plan to adjust the size of both larger and smaller voting districts and eliminate some districts. The appropriate elimination of some voting districts has helped reduce the demand for additional staffing and voting equipment. Additionally, eliminating the prohibition against local, state and federal employees from serving as poll workers on election day would increase the pool of citizens eligible to serve.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the Senate State Government Committee to abandon any consideration of Senate Bill 416. Instead, I strongly urge the Committee to focus its work on proposals that do not limit voter access, do not create partisan advantage and do not create security risk.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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