



Allegheny County Council

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Legislation Details (With Text)

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| Title: | Motion of the Council of Allegheny County expressing the sense of Council in calling for an expansion of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's emergency declaration to allow the county to send a ballot to every registered voter in Allegheny County so that the June 2, 2020 Primary Election may be conducted by mail, consistent with the recommendation the Allegheny County Health Department. | | | | |
| Sponsors: | Tom Duerr, Olivia Bennett, Paul Klein, DeWitt Walton, Patrick Catena | | | | |
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Motion of the Council of Allegheny County expressing the sense of Council in calling for an expansion of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's emergency declaration to allow the county to send a ballot to every registered voter in Allegheny County so that the June 2, 2020 Primary Election may be conducted by mail, consistent with the recommendation the Allegheny County Health Department.

Whereas, Act 12 of 2020 allowed for the consolidation of polling places for the primary, but no more than a 60% reduction in locations except as approved by the department of state; and

Whereas, there are 1,323 polling places within Allegheny County, which require a total of 6,615 poll workers on-site to function correctly; and

Whereas, a 60% reduction in polling places Countywide would result in 529 polling places remaining open, which would still require 2,645 poll workers on-site in order to function correctly; and

Whereas, regardless of the number of polling places, additional County staff and resources would be needed to provide for troubleshooting and overall elections operations; and

Whereas, as of April 13, Allegheny County had 47,313 mail and absentee ballot applications submitted online, and another 9,022 paper requests processed as well, for 56,335 total requests, a number which reflects about 16% of the number of ballots cast in the last presidential primary (359,800); and

Whereas, as of April 14, there are nearly 900 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Allegheny County; and

Whereas, due to community spread and limited capacity for testing, there is also a presumption that there are many other positives cases in the county; and

Whereas, voting in person could put our poll workers, many of whom are members of our most

vulnerable populations, who are most at risk for the most serious effects of COVID-19 - as well as the general voting public - at risk; and

Whereas, while the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania oversees the electoral process, the various counties are charged with administering the day-to-day operations and conduct elections, under the terms of the Commonwealth's Election Code, 25 P.S. §2600, *et. seq.*; and

Whereas, a mail-in ballot could be sent with two self-addressed stamped envelopes in which to return the ballot, with the first serving as a secrecy envelope and the second serving as the mailed envelope; and

Whereas, the mailed envelope could be signed by the voter so that, when returned, the signature of the voter could be checked against the signature on record before being opened, with validly signed ballots placed into a locked ballot box for election day; and

Whereas, for those who are unable to vote a paper ballot or have other needs that cannot be met through this process, other arrangements could be made through the Elections Division; and

Whereas, the Commonwealth's Department of State website allows voters to track their ballot so they can see when it is sent to them and when it is received by the County; and

Whereas, five states (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington) already conduct all elections primarily or exclusively by mail, with decades of experience (Oregon has conducted elections by mail since 2000, for example), and approximately two-thirds of the states allow "no-excuse" absentee ballots, all with no credible evidence of widespread voter fraud or election mishandling as a result of those voting methodologies; and

Whereas, the State of New York has already acted to allow all voters to participate by absentee ballot in their Primary Election, scheduled for June 23, 2020, via its Governor's emergency powers; and

Whereas, it is accordingly the judgment of Council that conducting the June 2, 2020 Primary Election via mail can be done securely and effectively if adequate time is allotted to prepare for doing so; and

Whereas, it is further the judgment of Council that voting by mail during the COVID-19 pandemic is the only logical course of action in light of the virus' contagious nature and its potential to threaten the lives of individuals who contract it; and

Whereas, it is lastly the judgment of Council that no voter should ever be placed in the position of having to choose between casting their vote and the health and safety of themselves and/or their immediate family members;

The Council of the County of Allegheny therefore hereby moves as follows:

Council hereby calls for an expansion of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's emergency declaration to allow the county to send a ballot to every registered voter in Allegheny County so that the June 2, 2020 Primary Election may be conducted by mail, consistent with the recommendation the Allegheny County Health Department.

The Council hereby further moves that:

Council respectfully requests that such expansion be accomplished with all deliberate speed, in order to allow adequate time to prepare to conduct the June 2, 2020 Primary Election by mail.