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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

Pa. Gov. Tom Wolf signs historic election reform bill into law

Oct 31, 2019 By [Jan Murphy | jmurphy@pennlive.com](mailto:jmurphy@pennlive.com)

According to an article posed on line by the Patriot News®, Gov. Tom Wolf put his signature on what has been described as the most significant change to Pennsylvania's election laws in more than 80 years when they were written.

By signing [the bill](#) into law, registered voters will soon be able to cast their ballot from the convenience of their own home in every election – primary, general or special – without having to provide an excuse as to why they can't make it to the polls on Election Day. Voters will be able to cast ballots by mail beginning with next year's primary on April 28. They also will be able register to vote as late as 15 days before an election, instead of the 30-day period that has been the rule for decades.

Further, they will be able to submit their mail-in or absentee ballot right up until 8 p.m. on the day of the election. The law allows for a permanent mailing list for voters requesting to automatically receive an application for a mail-in or absentee ballot in another convenience.

Perhaps the most controversial change relates to eliminating "straight-party voting" - the option of pushing one button to vote for all the candidates in a single party in general elections. Voters will now have to check off their choice for every contest in the general election, as opposed to simply voting for all Democrats or all Republicans.

The law authorizes the borrowing of \$90 million by the state to reimburse counties for up to 60 percent of the cost of replacing their voting machines with voter-verifiable paper trail election systems. The legislation also provides \$4 million for outreach efforts to work to ensure every Pennsylvanian is counted in the 2020 census.

"For too long Pennsylvania has made it too hard for the citizens to actually fully participate in our democracy," Wolf said at a bill-signing ceremony in the Governor's Reception Room at the Capitol surrounded by lawmakers and representatives of advocacy groups who pushed for the reforms. "These changes will make it easier for people to vote, participate in our democracy, actually to take care of the most fundamental responsibility of citizenship: voting." The governor further stated that the changes included in the bill align with the election code of states that have the highest voter participation. Right now, Pennsylvania, with a 51-percent voter participation rate in 2018, sits in the middle of the pack.

Sen. Lisa Boscola, D-Lehigh County, who sponsored the original bill to eliminate the straight-party voting that only seven other states allow, said that change puts "political parties on the run and gives voters more control."

To read and view entire article go to:

<https://www.pennlive.com/news/2019/10/pa-gov-tom-wolf-signs-historic-election-reform-bill-into-law.html>

