Testimony by Deputy Secretary for Elections and Commissions Jonathan Marks

Hearing on Voter Registration, March 4, 2021

Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss Pennsylvania's voter registration system.

Pennsylvania achieved an important milestone in voter registration just before the Nov. 3, 2020, election, with more than 9 million eligible citizens registered to vote. That is a record and a testament to the intense interest in the election and to extensive voter education efforts by both the Department of State and county boards of elections.

The Department of State partners with the 67 county election boards and voter registration commissions, as well as with the state agencies designated under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, to administer voter registration programs. The department also provides needed supplies and conducts training sessions and informational meetings for counties.

Through the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors, or SURE system, the department facilitates the requirements that Act 2002-3 put in place for county voter registration commissions. The SURE system was the first statewide database into which all 67 county voter registration legacy systems were migrated. Counties maintain voter registration and election data through the SURE system. Backups are performed regularly, and updates or enhancements to the system are made as necessary.

Each of the 67 counties enter data separately into SURE, working through a secure network on systems provided by the Department of State. Only authorized county personnel may access SURE. They enter voter registration information after verifying the voter's eligibility.

There are four ways Pennsylvanians can register to vote or update their registration:

- online on the Department of State's website
- by mail
- in person at their county board of elections office
- at PennDOT, when they obtain or renew their driver's license, and at other government agencies designated as voter registration agencies under the federal National Voter Registration Act and Act 2002-3.

Regardless of which voter registration option is used, the applicant's data goes to their county board of elections office and is entered into the SURE system by the county.

The county boards of elections are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the data that they enter into SURE. They correct any errors in their SURE data directly.

Counties perform regular list maintenance activities within the SURE system, including removing the names of deceased voters and voters who have confirmed that they have moved within the county, to another county in the Commonwealth, or outside the state. County boards of elections can utilize death notices from a handful of sources, including the state Department of Health. The Department of State facilitates the dissemination of death notices from the Department of Health twice monthly via the SURE system.

Counties send five-year notices to registrants who have not voted or otherwise updated their voter registration in the last five years. Counties also send notices to voters identified by the United States Postal Service (USPS) as having submitted a change of address to the Postal Service. Preliminary data shows that counties sent nearly 132,000 five-year notices and more than 158,000 address verification notices during 2020.

In carrying out list-maintenance activities, the counties also compare voter registration information shared by member states through the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) program, a non-profit organization governed and managed by the member states, currently 30 states and the District of Columbia. In addition to the information necessary to facilitate the National Change of Address program, Pennsylvania's membership in ERIC enables the Department of State to provide information to counties identifying in-state and out-of-state movers and potential duplicate voter registrations. Preliminary data shows that counties sent notices to more than 32,000 in-state movers and 31,000 out-of-state movers, and over 19,000 notices to potential duplicates.

The SURE system is nearly 20 years old and approaching the end of its useful life. The project to replace it is already underway and moving steadily forward.

In late 2020, after a comprehensive RFP process, BPro was selected to develop the SURE replacement.

We are working closely with the counties to form election process workgroups to ensure the new system best serves their election administration needs. Later in the process, counties will be enlisted to test the new system. The counties will be trained and granted access when the system becomes operational. The goal is for the new system to be in use by early 2022.

And now I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.