



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
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TESTIMONY ON VOTING BY MAIL

House State Government Committee Hearing
Wednesday, June 4, 2008

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania appreciates this opportunity to comment on the issue of voting by mail.

The Pennsylvania League does not have a specific position on universal voting by mail or universal absentee voting. However, we do support changing Pennsylvania law to permit no-excuse-necessary absentee voting. This would permit voters to choose the convenience of voting by mail. We believe this would help increase voter participation, especially in traditionally low turnout elections. It would also help voters whose work schedules or commutes make it difficult for them to vote in person and those who have difficulty predicting if they will be able to vote in person (e.g. a woman whose "due date" is on or near Election Day or someone whose job involves last minute travel).

In testimony before the Senate State Government Committee last year, (on moving the Pennsylvania Primary to an earlier date in presidential election years), we suggested that the nominating process for candidates for President only could be conducted by mail. In the absence of reform in the presidential nominating process to prevent front loading, this would permit Pennsylvania voters to have a meaningful role in selecting their party nominees for this office but avoid the numerous problems that a February primary would cause for state and local elections. Although it turns out that Pennsylvania Democrats still had a meaningful choice on April 22, 2008, the range of choices was severely narrowed and the Republican nominee was already determined.

Two states that have implemented universal or near universal vote by mail, Oregon and Washington State, have done so by experimenting first at the county level. Washington State still has two counties which do not vote by mail. If Pennsylvania were to decide to allow counties the option of experimenting with vote by mail as was done in Oregon and Washington State there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Article VII, Section 6 of the PA Constitution says "All laws regulating the holding of elections by the citizens, or for the registration of electors, shall be uniform throughout the state." Under Pennsylvania's current election structure if a county opted to conduct all mail voting for municipal elections this would also mean all mail voting for appellate court judgeships. Thus, the election for these statewide offices would not be uniform unless judicial elections were separated from municipal elections.

The arguments for or against universal voting by mail and no-excuse-necessary absentee balloting are well known so we will not comment on them here. However, we would welcome the opportunity to comment further as this issue moves forward.