

**Testimony of Samuel Derheimer  
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The Pew Charitable Trusts**

**House State Government Committee  
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Good morning. My name is Samuel Derheimer, and I manage the Election Initiatives team for The Pew Charitable Trusts. I want to thank Chairman Metcalfe and the Committee for the opportunity to discuss how state and local election officials can best prepare for a smooth and secure Election Day.

Pew has spent the better part of the past decade working with state election officials, academics, and technology experts from across the country to assess and improve state voter registration and election systems.

Over the past several General Election cycles, Pew's Elections Performance Index<sup>1</sup> (EPI) has provided an in-depth, data-driven look at state performance in elections.

From the initial release of the Index, covering data from the 2008 election, through the most recent release this past summer that covered the 2014 election, Pennsylvania performs above average in key indicators of state election systems. These include the number of provisional ballots cast and rejected, registration and absentee ballot problems, the number of mail ballots rejected, and the number of military and overseas ballots rejected.

Further, Pennsylvania can, and should, boast about having one of the shortest recorded wait times to cast a ballot nationwide —just one and a half minutes, on average—bested only by the three states that operate all vote-by-mail elections.

Pennsylvania also ranks highly in our Index with 100 percent data completeness. Without full and transparent data collection, it's difficult, if not impossible, to assess the health of a state's election system. While it may not generate headlines, good data reporting is the foundation for meaningful evaluations which can point toward areas in need of improvement so that resources can be appropriately allocated.

Pennsylvania has also adopted new tools and technologies that will make the election more secure and boost voter confidence.

Rather than responding to incidents after-the-fact, tools like online voter registration and the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) reduce opportunities for fraud and abuse before they can occur. And Pennsylvania's participation in the Voting Information Project (VIP) empowers voters by arming them with the information they need to navigate the election process.

Online voter registration has been offered in states for over a decade, beginning with Arizona in 2002. Today, citizens in 32 states and the District of Columbia can register or update their existing registration record electronically, without the need to sign, print, or mail a paper form.

States like Pennsylvania that have moved to online voter registration have seen a significant improvement in the integrity and accuracy of the voter rolls, primarily by removing the "middle-man" from the registration process. Online registration systems put the power of registration directly into the hands of

the applicant. It is the voters themselves who are in the best position to ensure that their information is correct, legible, and submitted directly to election officials. When citizens don't have access to a secure online portal, voter registration is typically driven by third-party groups that encourage citizens to fill out paper forms by hand and then hold those forms until they eventually turn them in to a local election office.

And because online applicants in most states provide a driver's license or state ID number that is checked one-to-one against the voter's file on record with the state – as is the case here in Pennsylvania – citizens who register online go through additional identity verification beyond that applied to those who use paper.

Voter registration applications received electronically also result in more accurate records. By eliminating that paper “middle man,” online registration removes the primary causes of data errors – such as sloppy handwriting on paper forms and third-party data entry. In 2009, election officials in Maricopa County, Arizona found that voter registration applications received on paper were up to five times more likely to result in an error in the official voter record than applications received electronically.<sup>ii</sup>

To ensure voters' information remains private and protected, states have commonly employed security measures such as data encryption, audit logs, CAPTCHA, and secure networks. It is also possible to flag IP addresses from which unusual traffic originates for investigation. These security measures cannot be employed with paper forms.

Earlier this year, Pennsylvania also joined ERIC. Through its partnership with the 20 other ERIC states, including several neighboring states, such as Delaware, Maryland, Ohio, and West Virginia, state election officials receive actionable data to improve the accuracy and completeness of the state voter rolls.

ERIC points election officials to eligible but unregistered citizens, allowing the election officials, rather than the campaigns or third-party advocacy groups, to reach out to these eligible citizens prior to the registration deadline and educate them on the most efficient and accurate way to register – through Pennsylvania's online voter registration system. By encouraging these potential voters to register earlier in the cycle and online, election officials can reduce the crush of registration applications that always arrive right at the registration deadline, a time when election officials are most busy with all the other work of hosting a statewide election.

Once registered, voters can find the information they need to cast their ballot online with the Department of State's voting information system, or through the state's participation in the Voting Information Project. VIP is a partnership between Pew, Google, and state election officials to package key election information and put it where voters will naturally come across it, such as on Facebook, on local newspaper web sites, and on candidate web sites.

During the April primary, we saw nearly 125,000 lookups of polling place information in Pennsylvania through VIP's Get To The Polls application. Those voters received accurate polling place information, sourced directly from state and local election officials. Voters are even given a map to their polling site.

Recently adopted tools like these will have a substantial impact on voters' experience on Election Day. When voters cast their ballots on November 8<sup>th</sup> and experience a smooth process – showing up to the correct precinct, finding their names accurately listed in the voter rolls, and waiting in some of the shortest lines in the nation – their confidence in the outcome of the election increases. Researchers have found that a bad experience on Election Day can reduce voter confidence.<sup>iii</sup>

When comparing like elections, Pennsylvania is notably moving in the right direction, improving its score in our Election Performance Index in the 2012 data compared to 2008, and also in the 2014 data

compared to 2010. By adopting proven tools and policies that make voter registration more accurate and efficient, and by putting election information where voters can easily find it, you have made significant strides to improve the experience for voters and to reduce opportunities for fraud and abuse before they can become realities.

The Pew Charitable Trusts applauds these proactive efforts to ensure a secure and smooth election. While it may be impossible to avoid all problems on Election Day, your work over the past several years to eliminate problems before they rise by employing modern technology and better data practices should be commented.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit this testimony to the committee. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [sderheimer@pewtrusts.org](mailto:sderheimer@pewtrusts.org).

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/multimedia/data-visualizations/2014/elections-performance-index>

<sup>ii</sup> The Brennan Center for Justice: *The Case for Voter Registration Modernization*, 2013.

<http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Case%20Voter%20Registration%20Modernization.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Researchers found that bad experiences at the polls can reduce a voter's confidence in the election system by up to 10 percent. Atkeson, L.R. (2014) 'Voter Confidence in 2010', in Alvarez, R.M. and Grofman, B. (eds.) *Election Administration in the United States: The State of Reform after Bush v. Gore*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 102–119.