

**HOUSE STATE GOVERNMENT HEARING
Election Oversight Hearing: Election Audits
Thursday, February 11, 2021**

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Following twenty plus years of administrative service in mostly educational settings, I came to Sullivan County as Director of Elections and Voter Registration in 2017. The May Primary Election will mark my eighth election cycle in the position. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration with a focus in Human Resource Management and serve my community as a member of various boards and organizations including Treasurer of the Sullivan County Fair Board, Booking Chair of the Sullivan County Dairy Committee and as a local 4-H leader. I am very passionate about educating the public on voting and elections, and take every opportunity to answer questions from our community to help promote confidence in our election process.

Since 2019 I have been a member of the Pennsylvania Post Election Audit Workgroup. Our group was tasked with studying models of post-election audits in order to develop recommendations and work with the legislature to suggest possible legislative enhancements to the post-election audit process. After looking at several audit methods, the group focused on the Risk Limiting Audit (RLA) which uses statistical methods to provide election outcome verification and detect any inconsistencies. Prior to the two state-wide pilot RLAs conducted by the Department of State, the audit workgroup carried out two pilots on county-wide races in Mercer and Philadelphia counties. In all cases, the results showed a statistical degree of certainty in the election outcomes.

Currently, Pennsylvania counties are mandated by 25 P.S. § 3031.17 to conduct an audit of randomly selected ballots equal to 2% of the votes cast or 2,000 (whichever is lesser) after each election and prior to certification. While this audit process has worked for local or even county-wide races, it is difficult to verify a state-wide or federal outcome using this method. The main

problem exists in that each county conducts the 2% audit differently. While most counties will randomly draw which batches or precincts are to be audited, the actual audit method can vary from a hand recount and tally to a simple re-scan of the ballots using a different machine. There is nothing in the statute prescribing the method to be used nor is there a standard report for results or process of reporting said results. Regardless of the audit method used, standardization among counties is essential to assure a valid outcome in a state-wide race.

Sullivan County participated in the state-wide pilots as well as the statutory 2% audits in 2020. For both methods, ballot chain of custody and storage is crucial. In Sullivan County, ballot custody begins with the Judge of Election for each local voting precinct and ends with the County Director of Elections storing the ballots in a locked container in a locked room. Custody is logged each step of the way and any time ballots are removed from the locked storage containers (for example for auditing purposes) they are signed out. Likewise, mail ballots are stored in a locked area at all times following receipt and verification by the elections office and after pre-canvas and scanning. They are signed out if removed from the storage for any reason.

From a County Election Director's perspective, no one wants to verify the outcome of an election more than we do. If there are issues, we want to be the first to know and would welcome a more robust audit process. However, we need more time. There are currently only three weeks between election-day and county certification, and many tasks must be completed in that time. Counties must finish canvassing all mail ballots cast, which as you know was a record number this past election. They must reconcile the number of voters with the number of ballots cast, canvas all provisional ballots, and investigate any abnormalities or challenges.

During the November, 2020 RLA pilot, most counties acknowledged the process is not a difficult one, but they did not appreciate the extra time involved when they are already mandated to conduct the 2% audit. To them it seemed redundant and they were not sure it would be understood by voters. This is one of the reasons why the audit workgroup has suggested that instead of adding more audits, the legislature replace the 2% audit with a more enhanced post-election audit to be determined by the Department of State which could include, but is not limited to, the risk limiting audit.

Counties could also benefit from more time to pre-canvas mail ballots. This would not only allow more time for post-election audits and other crucial tasks, but it would also promote election integrity and public confidence in the system. Another way to guarantee all post-election processes are validated and complete prior to certification would be to simply adjust the timeline between election-day and certification.

In conclusion feedback from county directors overwhelmingly indicates a need for some form of guidance and standardization, especially among our newer members. County election personnel have seen greater than a 30% turnover rate since the 2020 primary. This included a loss of some veteran Directors who provided much needed insight to new members, and their loss has been felt. New Directors are not provided with a handbook or “how to” guide. Granted, counties are all different in their size and demographic, and what works for Philadelphia might not work exactly for Sullivan. But, in order to boost public confidence, there must be standardized guidelines to follow not only in auditing of the election, but in election processes themselves.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer perspective from the county level. The committee’s willingness to seek ground-level input is greatly appreciated.