

Time needed to process mail-in ballots

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As COVID-19 cases climb in Pennsylvania, it is important to address voter concerns about mail-in voting. Legislators have about a week to assure voters that we can vote safely and securely, in-person or by mail. It is a great relief for senior citizens to be able to vote by mail and to have the voter resources provided by Pennsylvania's State Department at www.VotesPa.com.

Although voter registration closed Oct. 19, voters can still apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot through Oct. 27. The same website will check your registration and find your polling place if you wish to vote in person.

Some voters are worried about the handling of their mail-in ballots. But it's important to know that the Postal Service has reversed decisions that threatened to reduce post office hours, remove some collection boxes and sorting machines, and cut overtime for mail carriers.

The Postal Service will now prioritize election mail. And the drop box at the Indiana County Court House is secure.

Also reassuring is that the Pennsylvania Legislature decided not to move forward with a House resolution that would have created a "Select Committee on Election Integrity," seen as partisan and redundant.

However, House Republicans have not agreed to allow processing of the roughly 3 million mail-in ballots expected statewide before Election Day. Election officials have to verify signatures, open two envelopes, settle eligibility or identity disputes, and get the ballots ready to tabulate.

Without time for "pre-canvassing" before the election, the process could take days. No mail-in voter wants to imagine the possibilities for error under intense, post-election media pressure.

Early in October, Republican Jeff Snyder, president of Pennsylvania's County Commissioners Association, told NBC News, "If state leaders want to run the risk of negative national news coverage during a presidential election — in a battleground state — with anticipated high turnout, then they should do nothing." We need to ask our legislators one simple thing: "Do something that shows you value accuracy in vote counts." Time for pre-canvassing of mail-in ballots is a must.

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