

CITIZENS FOR LANGUAGE ACCESS

August 29, 2022

VIA EMAIL

Hon. Al Schmidt, Secretary of State
Pennsylvania Department of State
302 North Office Building
401 North Street
Harrisburg PA 17120

RE: Language Accessible Voter Registration and Vote By Mail

Dear Secretary Schmidt,

We are grateful for the Pennsylvania Department of State's collaborative approach with community stakeholder organizations and election officials toward ensuring language access to the ballot. The Department's Language Access Guidance to counties was a significant step toward equity in voting. We continue to share a priority of ensuring that all eligible Pennsylvanians can cast a ballot no matter their ethnic or national origins so that every voter can exercise their fundamental right to vote.

Voters who speak primary languages other than English have historically been victims of de facto disenfranchisement where ballots and other critical election materials are provided only in English. Throughout Pennsylvania, at least 380,000 people speak primary languages other than English.¹ According to the Pennsylvania Immigrant and Citizenship Coalition, New Americans represented at least 7.9% of the voting population in PA in 2020, and this number has since grown.

Therefore, we strongly encourage the Pennsylvania Department of State to make the low-cost, high-impact investments to publish **(1) voter registration** and **(2) vote-by-mail** forms in *at least ten of the Commonwealth's most-spoken languages* beyond what is mandated by Sec. 203 of the Voting Rights Act. The form designs should include both English and the minority language for versatility of use and ease of processing by election officials.

Analysis of the most recent U.S. Census data shows that between **98,290 and 251,701** eligible Pennsylvania voters could be better served with expanded form availability for LEP (Limited English Proficiency) citizens of voting age in the following most spoken languages: Vietnamese, Pennsylvania German, Russian, Nepali, Korean, Arabic, Bengali, Italian, Gujarati, French, and Khmer (Cambodian). The cited population data of this breakdown is included as an exhibit with this letter.

In 2020, the Department proactively published Chinese and Vietnamese language voter registration and vote-by-mail forms beyond federal legal requirements, however, the Vietnamese language voting forms are no longer available on the Department website.

Voter registration is the first step of political participation, foundational to the relationship between the state and its citizenry. It is also noteworthy that mail voting eliminates sometimes intimidating or hostile environments that new Americans face at polling places. We, therefore, urge your department to make this meaningful step toward voter enfranchisement for minority language-speaking communities on the margins, and with less than 70 days

¹U.S. Census ACS 1-year Estimates Table B16001 and U.S. Census ACS 5-year Estimates Table S1601

until Election Day, there is a closing window for the administration to uphold its values of equity and inclusivity for language minority voters ahead of this important election year.

We look forward to further collaborating with your office to review any content that might be necessary to ensure publication in time for the November general election. Members of our coalition will be glad to discuss the next steps in addressing the vital need for voter registration and vote-by-mail forms with Department staff.

Respectfully,

Citizens for Language Access

Exhibit A:

Language	LEP (limited English proficiency) voters served
Vietnamese	17,866 - 28,432
Pennsylvania German	12,440 - 45,596
Russian	12,431 - 31,258
Nepali	9,345 - 11,650
Korean	8,193 - 17,443
Arabic	7,624 - 25,304
Bengali	6,701 - 13,869
Italian	6,503 - 24,323
Gujarati	6,399 - 21,468
French	5,447 - 23,481
Cambodian (Khmer)	4,836 - 8,877
Total:	98,290 - 251,701

(Age 18-99; All Citizens)

Source: *U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey*

Signed:

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Abolitionist Law Center

ACLU-PA

Action Together NEPA

All Voting Is Local

Americans for Democratic Action, Southeastern PA

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC

Asian Americans United

Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance (API PA)

Bethel AME Church

Better PA

Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP)

CAIR-Philadelphia

Campaign Legal Center

CASA

Casa San Jose
Ceiba
Center for Coalfield Justice
ChineseinUS (CUS)
Common Cause Pennsylvania
Disability Rights Pennsylvania
Fair Elections Center
Filipino Executive Council of Greater Philadelphia (FECGP)
In This Together NEPA
Japanese American Citizens League Philadelphia Chapter
KITHS Integrated and Targeted Human Services
Lancaster AAPI
League of Women Voters of PA
Make the Road PA
National Association of Social Workers, Pennsylvania Chapter (NASW-PA)
Nationalities Service Center
New PA Project Education Fund
New Pennsylvania Project
NextGen America
One Pennsylvania
PA Stands Up
PA Youth Vote
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition
Pennsylvania Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Pennsylvania United
Pennsylvania Voice
Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation
Philadelphia Community Lifeline
Planned Parenthood Pennsylvania Advocates
Positive Women's Network-USA
Promote The Vote PA
Rise PA
RuralOrganizing.org
SEAMAAC, Inc.
SEIU PA State Council
Supermajority Education Fund
The Voter Project
Together for PR (Pine-Richland)
United Voices for Philadelphia
Urban Erie Community Development Corp
UrbnSEEK! Vote for What?
VietLead
Voice of Westmoreland
Woori Center
Young Professionals of Color

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