

August 10, 2006

Timothy H. Johnson, Director
Department of Administrative Services
County of Allegheny, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I appreciate the time you spent on the phone with me yesterday to apprise me of the status of my June 12th questions about the processes and outcomes of the May 16th primary election and the County's plans for the general election in November.

I called after having become concerned that my information request, or the County's response, might have fallen through the cracks between your June 15th letter to me and the present. I'm encouraged to hear that instead your response has been delayed by an understandable desire to respond first to the Secretary of the Commonwealth's query. It also makes sense that your office would address simpler information requests from the public before mine. Finally, I am encouraged to hear that a response to my questions is likely within two weeks.

However, as we discussed, I am concerned about the amount of time that has already elapsed. In particular, I do not believe the voting systems and procedures employed in the primary included adequate safeguards against voters being unable to cast votes or against votes being corrupted, lost, or incorrectly tallied. In my judgement, the County must significantly upgrade the trustworthiness of our election systems and procedures before November—as outlined, for example, in the June 5th VotePA-Allegheny report on the primary. Given the lead time necessary for orderly deployment of voting system changes, I suspect decisions must be made fairly soon.

I believe it was at the June 12th Board of Elections meeting that Paul O'Hanlon of the Disabilities Law Project called for an end to adversarial interactions between the County and citizens concerned about voting-system integrity. I fear that as long as members of the public are limited to reacting after the fact to decisions made by the County, instead of being involved in making those decisions, that the relationship will remain contentious. Of the roughly six months between the primary and the general election, nearly half of that time has elapsed without interested citizens receiving the County's detailed evaluation of voting-system integrity issues. I fear that this delay and the subsequent very tight decision window will result in further unilateral decisions made by the County, a November election of doubtful integrity, and extended citizen dissent.

I hope to hear from you soon, and also hope my fears prove to be unfounded.

Sincerely,

David A. Eckhardt, Ph.D.
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