

TAXPAYER ALERT

ELECTION DAY STAFFING



Administering elections is quite possibly the most important of our governmental functions, as it is indeed the basis upon which our governments are able to function. However, despite its high visibility, many citizens may not realize the significant efforts that occur behind the scenes to carry out our elections.

Without those who staff our polling places on Election Day, our voices as citizens could not be heard. But in recent years, it has become more and more difficult to find citizens willing to give their time to the democratic process, especially when it involves long hours of work on a weekday for minimal pay.

ATTENTION TO PROPER ELECTION STAFFING IS NEEDED

- **Correct Uneven Staffing:** In the 2016 Primary Election, some districts with very large numbers of registered voters had an inadequate number of workers, which presents problems in a high turnout election such as the upcoming General Election. Meanwhile, some districts with far smaller numbers of voters had extra workers.
- **Increase Pay:** Most poll workers are paid just over \$8 per hour for a work day which exceeds 12 hours. This inadequate level of pay can make it difficult to attract workers, and has not been raised since 2008.
- **Allow Flexible Hours:** The Elections Division should permit poll workers to work partial days as a convenient option for those unwilling or unable to commit to the entire day.
- **Engage Students and Youth:** Programs to recruit college and high school students as poll workers can initiate involvement well into the future.

While our state legislators should consider steps being taken in jurisdictions around the country which can streamline the voting process, such as early voting and no excuse absentee voting, proactive steps must be taken at the County level to ensure our elections are conducted as smoothly and reliably as possible under the existing rules.

Our poll workers should be appreciated and thanked for what they do, many of them for years or even decades. I hope those reading this report will consider giving of their time to assist in the work of democracy. If you would like to work a poll, please visit: www.county.allegheny.pa.us/elections/volunteers.aspx

Warmest Regards,

Chelsa Wagner
Allegheny County Controller



POLL WORKERS ARE NOT BEING ASSIGNED EVENLY

For the purpose of elections, Allegheny County is divided into 1,319 Election Districts. Each of the County's 130 municipalities consists of one or more Election Districts. Each of the City of Pittsburgh's 32 Wards is also divided into Election Districts.

Each Election District is staffed by poll workers including a Judge of Election, Majority and Minority Inspectors, Machine Inspectors, Clerks, and Constables. For the 2016 Primary Election, 7,069 workers were employed to work the polls at a cost of approximately \$772,000.

The number of registered voters in each Election District can vary greatly. Eleven districts in the County have more than 2,000 registered voters, while eight have fewer than 100.

The Elections Division must ensure that districts are staffed evenly, with particular attention to those with large numbers of registered voters. High turnout in populous districts that are understaffed could lead to unacceptable delays for voters and, ultimately, voter suppression.

Ideally, each voting district will be staffed by five poll workers. However, in the 2016 Primary, seven districts in which more than 1,000 voters are registered had the minimum of three poll workers (excluding constables). By contrast:

- Two districts in Pittsburgh with fewer than 200 registered voters, and in which fewer than 50 ballots were cast, had six poll workers.
- Five districts around the County with fewer than 500 registered voters, and in which fewer than 200 ballots were cast, had seven poll workers.
- A district in Hazelwood with 359 registered voters, and in which only 76 ballots were cast, had eight poll workers.
- A district in Oakland with 604 registered voters, and in which 163 ballots were cast, had nine workers.

Most workers are not bound to the Election District in which they reside and can be recruited by the Elections Division to work in any precinct. **Record keeping and planning must be improved to ensure that some districts are not understaffed while others have more workers than necessary.**



Pennsylvania residents can now register to vote online at:

www.votespa.com

County residents may verify their registration, look up their polling place and view a sample ballot online at <http://apps.county.allegheny.pa.us/VoteDistricts/>

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ELECTIONS DIVISION MUST IMPROVE OUTREACH

The Elections Division must explore new ways to ensure that our polling places are fully staffed, and to bring younger people into the process to allow for continuity of service into the future. To fully staff each Election District with a full complement of five workers, **the County must recruit about 360 new poll workers over the number who served in the 2016 Primary Election.**

INCREASE WORKER PAY

Judges of Election are paid \$110 per Election Day, and \$20 plus mileage for the pickup and return of election materials. Other poll workers are paid \$105 per day. These amounts were last adjusted in 2008. Current state law permits counties to pay Judges of Election up to \$200 per day and other workers up to \$195. **Increasing the pay of all poll workers by 25 percent would cost the County an additional \$175,000 per election.**

While even increased pay would amount to a small financial reward for a work day of 12 hours or more, it could serve as an incentive for longstanding poll workers to remain and for others to take part in our elections.

ALLOW FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

The Elections Division should permit poll workers to work partial days, which it does not currently allow. This would allow needed positions to be filled by those unwilling or unable to commit to the entire day, and could be an attractive option for introducing new workers into the process without an onerous time commitment.

OUR FUTURE: STUDENTS SHOULD BE STAFFING OUR POLLS

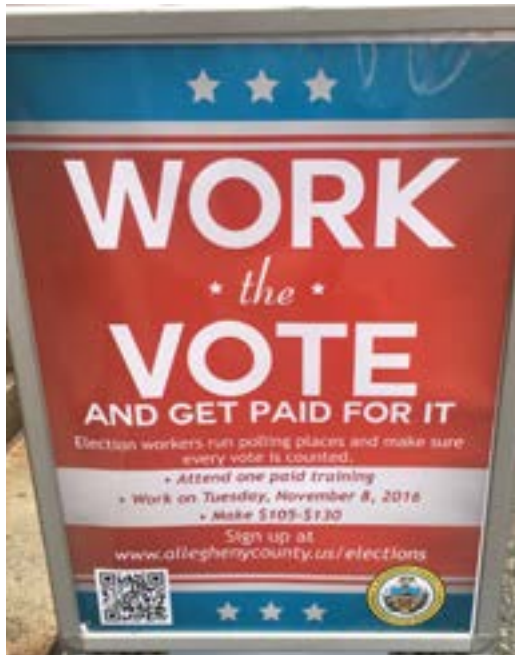
City University of New York runs a Poll-Worker Initiative which recruits and trains hundreds of students to serve as poll workers to help address shortages for primary and general elections. **The Elections Division should initiate a partnership with Community College of Allegheny County or other institutions** to bring new poll workers into the process.

Even younger students can be brought into the election process, which would have the potential to pay dividends for many years into the future. Students at least 17 years old are able to serve as Machine Inspectors or Clerks, and **the Elections Division should seek to promote poll work to students** as community service projects and resume builders. Berks County in Eastern Pennsylvania and other large counties around the country run programs to recruit high school students who meet academic standards to be poll workers.

ADDRESS DIVERSITY

Recruiting poll workers with foreign language skills is likely to be a growing concern in coming years. **The Elections Division should begin working now with diverse community organizations** to bring members of these communities into the elections process.

BACKGROUND: FEW POLL POSITIONS BEING FILLED IN ELECTIONS



Judges of Election and Majority and Minority Inspectors are to be elected by the voters of each Election District every four years. To seek these positions, one must be a registered voter, obtain a nominating petition form from the Elections Division, and collect a small number of signatures of registered voters in the Election District – ten for Judges of Election, and five for Inspector. Those completing this process then appear on the Primary and General Election ballot in their Election District just like candidates for other offices.

These positions were last elected in 2013. According to Elections Division results of those elections, **only 20 percent of Election Districts elected a Judge of Election** because no one sought the office in most districts.

In districts that do not elect a Judge, one must be appointed by the Elections Division. While appointed Judges can certainly fulfill their duties ably and must be commended for their service, elected Judges can be instrumental in filling the other positions

in their district. An elected Judge also ensures a degree of familiarity with the community.

The Elections Division, municipalities, and community organizations should seek to increase awareness of the election process for Judges of Election and other election officials, which will take place again in 2017. Those interested in seeking the positions of Judge of Election, Majority Inspector, or Minority Inspector in their Election District should contact the Elections Division for a nominating petition form in February 2017.

While our elections are being carried out reliably through the work of many dedicated citizens, we must always be vigilant in safeguarding this vital government function. Ensuring that each and every polling location is properly staffed is essential to the integrity of our elections now and into the future. **Allegheny County must address this issue by correcting uneven polling place staffing, increasing poll worker pay, allowing flexible work hours, and engaging students and youth.**

TO FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COUNTY GOVERNMENT

County Contracts Online

An initiative of Allegheny County Controller Chelsa Wagner, provides online access to all contracts entered into by Allegheny County, an unprecedented level of transparency of County spending.

OpenGov Allegheny

Another new Controller's Office initiative, provides up-to-date access to County financial information and other data through a user-friendly online platform, bringing open government to its citizens' fingertips.

These resources can be accessed at www.AlleghenyController.com