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Governor Wolf Signs Law to Help Prepare for the General Election

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf signed into law House Bill 2502, now Act 35 of 2020, that requires the Department of State to publish a report on the June 2, 2020, primary election. The report will help identify any necessary changes to the Pennsylvania Election Code before the general election in November.

“Despite a pandemic, Pennsylvania had a safe and successful primary election, but improvements can always be made,” said Gov. Wolf. “Thanks to historic election reform last year, voters were able to embrace new mail-in voting and use new voting machines. Now we must prepare for the presidential election and the huge turnout that is expected in November. This report will help to pinpoint ways to make our election process better.”

The report will include a series of data points for each county relating to the reforms of Act 77 of 2019 and Act 12 of 2020, including the numbers of mail-in ballots that were applied for and received, the number of new voter registrations received, and what time each county began to pre-canvass and canvass absentee and mail-in ballots.

The primary election was the first time Pennsylvanians could vote by mail-in ballot without having to provide an excuse. Nearly 1.5 million mail-in or absentee ballot were cast, 17 times the number that voted absentee in the 2016 primary, when approximately 84,000 absentee ballots were cast.

To help counties with the surge of mail-in ballots and to reduce delays in reporting election results, the department supports a proposed legislative change to allow counties to begin processing mailed ballots in the weeks before election day. Under current law, counties cannot begin to pre-canvass these ballots until 7 a.m. on election day.

The final 22 counties also debuted new voting systems in the primary, completing a two-year initiative to bring state-of-the-art voting systems to all 67 counties.