

**BERKS COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
MEETING MINUTES
April 11, 2024 – 11:00 A.M.**

Michael S. Rivera, Chair
Christian Y. Leinbach, Vice Chair – not present
Dante Santoni, Jr., Commissioner
Anne Norton, Chief Clerk
Christine M. Sadler, County Solicitor – not present
Cody L. Kauffman, First Assistant County Solicitor

CALL TO ORDER: 11:00 A.M.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

None.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Board approved the minutes for the March 28, 2024, Election Board meeting as presented.

Commissioner Rivera noted that the Election Board held an executive session on April 4, 2024, to discuss personnel and security.

Agenda Items

1. Approve Poll Worker Appointment

On the motion of Commissioner Santoni, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, the Board approved the appointment of poll workers for the April 23, 2024, General Primary. Anne Norton informed the Board that there are roughly 915 appointed poll workers and they will receive letters advising them of their official appointment.

Election Director's Report

Ms. Norton shared that voters have started receiving ballots and that, as of that morning more than 20,000 mail-in and absentee ballots had been requested. The last day to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot is Tuesday, April 16.

She said there is currently only one open poll worker position but the staff anticipates a few more by Election Day due to last-minute dropouts and scheduling conflicts.

Finally, Ms. Norton noted that the Logic and Accuracy testing of the central high-speed scanners and tabulators for the 2024 General Primary will start Friday, April 12, at the SAM Building, 19 N. 6th St. at 9 a.m. She said information about attending as an observer is available on the elections section of the county website. The L&A testing of the electronic poll books is scheduled to begin on Monday, April 15, at the Berks County South Campus, 400 E Wyomissing Ave, Mohnton.

General Comments from the Board regarding current election-related issues

Commissioner Santoni asked how many ballots have come back thus far and how many of them have been declined due to issues like no signature or no date. Assistant Director Stephanie Nojiri said only 17 ballots have been returned so far and none of them have been rejected.

Commissioner Rivera shared that the board has been receiving questions about why the ballots went out so late. He explained that a candidate had been challenged and removed from the ballot and filed an appeal to that ruling, which then had to go before a judge. The County waited until that ruling so that the ballots would be accurate. He said that if the ballot had gone out with that candidate's name still on it, there could have been potential legal issues.

Public Comment

Jeffrey Wolfe, Brecknock Township, submitted written comments and requested that all certified observers be allowed to observe the prec canvass of ballots prior to Election Day, throughout Election Day, and observe any ballots received late and ballots set aside for various reasons. He also asked that observers be permitted to observe the central scan tabulators to see the number on them prior to 7 a.m., shortly after 8 p.m. and after the canvass is complete. Finally, he asked that observers be allowed to see the secure areas where ballots are stored.

Debbie Noel, Robeson Township, said she understood there are guidelines at the state level that need to be addressed, but that she does not believe that was a good enough reason for why the ballots did not get to voters sooner. She claimed that other counties had voters who received and returned their ballots before she got her ballot. She said Berks County must do better in this regard and lamented that Berks only has three ballot drop boxes. She said that maybe since more Republicans are now utilizing mail-in ballots, the Board will show more interest in addressing these concerns.

Zelda Yoder, Reading, said the biggest issue countywide is that voter turnout is hideously low and that she expects the same for the upcoming primary. She said factors like voter apathy are out of the Board's control, but election processes can be addressed and could make a difference. She said that widespread voter fraud is not an issue, but said that even one incident is important and brought up an incident in which someone she knew requested a ballot but was denied because her signature did not match. She agreed that the signature on the application and the signature on file were not the same, but felt it was still wrong for the application to be denied.

Commissioner Santoni reminded voters that voting by mail is safe and secure. He encouraged voters to follow the instructions and to remember to sign and date their ballots. He said the Board will continue to work with legislators to make the necessary changes to the process.

Commissioner Rivera said the Board encourages members of the public to be engaged and come to meetings. He noted that a lot of the comments involve issues that are part of the law that are set by state legislators, not the County Election Board. He said he took offense to the comment suggesting that the Board will show more interest now that Republicans are requesting mail-in ballots. He said this is not a political issue and that the decisions he makes are to make sure everyone that wants to vote by mail can do so.

Adjournment:

On the motion of Commissioner Santoni, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, the meeting was adjourned at 11:18 am.

Respectfully Submitted,



Anne Norton, Chief Clerk