August 17, 2020

Dear Lehigh County Commissioners,

I write to you today with a profound sense of urgency regarding the 2020 General Election. As many of you are certainly aware, President Trump has openly committed himself to undermining the Post Office in an effort to prevent Americans successfully voting-by-mail.

In a recent interview on Fox News the President stated “Now they need that money in order to make the post office work so it can take all of these millions and millions of ballots... Now, if we don’t make a deal, that means they don’t get the money. That means they can’t have universal mail-in voting, they just can’t have it.”

All of this stems from entirely unfounded claims about potential voter fraud which Kris Kobach’s former sham commission was shut down after it struggled to find any compelling evidence. Vice recently reported that the post office is deactivating mail sorting machines ahead of the election.

Not only is this action profoundly corrupt and undemocratic, but it will jeopardize the safety of millions of Americans who may elect instead to vote in person, risking exposure to the Coronavirus. Furthermore, it undermines one of the most fundamental reforms in modern voting by casting wildly unsubstantiated aspersions on mail-in voting and its security.

As our recent report on election recommendations describes, in-person voting in Wisconsin led to increases in positive cases of Coronavirus. These impacts will only be magnified during a general election with higher turnout. If our residents doubt the capacity of the post-office to successfully deliver their ballot before the deadline, it’s likely they’ll either vote in person or potentially not participate.

I’m urging the Board of Commissioners and Executive Armstrong to immediately deploy mail-in drop off boxes at county owned-facilities, as well as providing additional drop-off locations on election day. The failure to do so will undermine the democratic process and could potentially threaten to suppress tens of thousands of votes.

Lehigh County could also consider setting up satellite election offices in county-owned buildings where voters who have not already applied for mail-in ballots can complete them in-person weeks prior. This would allow for multiple safe and secure opportunities to vote.

A recent study by the Philadelphia Inquirer found that the close to Election Day that applications were processed, the less likely a voter was to cast a ballot. Applications processed before May 12, had a 90% chance of being returned, but those processed three weeks before had only a 76% chance of being returned.

The right to vote is the most fundamental and sacred right, the true equalizer of American society. Counties are given the tremendous responsibility of running our election process. We cannot falter in the face of the greatest election crisis in modern history. Now is the time for our newly elected board to show that we can rise above party and ideology in order to protect and defend every one of our resident’s right to vote.

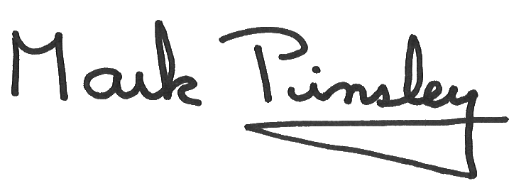
In the long-run such practices can result in savings to the county and long-term changes in voting behaviors that make participation easier for all. States that practice universal vote-by-mail or vote almost entirely through mail have significantly lower election costs.

I’m aware that many of you may feel threatened by the prospect of a lawsuit, however we should acknowledge its source. The Trump Campaign is attempting to threaten and coerce counties into failing to meet their responsibilities. This is not the Department of Justice or a lawsuit over civil rights. This is a desperate effort by a candidate deeply contemptuous of democracy.

I encourage each of you to consider the actual cost of a potential civil rights lawsuit against the county stemming from disenfranchising our voters. We were presented with an actual crisis, and provided with a legitimate solution, and still didn’t act. This presents endless opportunities for thousands of voters whose votes could potentially go uncounted to bring charges against the county.

We should band together with other counties and push back against this frivolous lawsuit. We should not fall from our responsibilities and we should have the courage to stand up for the democratic process. As a county we should put out the boxes and fight for our right to ensure that all of our residents have the right to vote.

Cordially,



Mark Pinsley, MBA

Lehigh County Controller