

## **Amy Widestrom Column Continued**

The lack of true early in-person voting affects all Pennsylvanians — rural, urban, and suburban voters alike.

Parents juggling work and child care, seniors who need extra time and assistance and working people who can't afford to take time off on Election Day all face barriers that make voting unnecessarily difficult.

This is not a partisan problem, it is a systemic issue that suppresses participation across party lines.

We hear from too many frustrated Pennsylvanians who miss the opportunity to vote or who have to make hard decisions to exercise their right to vote simply because our system doesn't accommodate real-world circumstances.

The solution is clear: Pennsylvania needs a well-resourced early in-person voting system that allows voters to cast their ballots with the same process and security as on Election Day.

This is a proven, nonpartisan reform — used successfully in nearly two-thirds of the states, including Republican-led states like Florida, Georgia, and Texas. These states demonstrate that early voting increases participation, strengthens election security, and eases the pressure on election officials and polling places on Election Day.

Critics argue that our mail-in voting system is enough. But the reality tells a different story. When voters line up outside county election offices — sometimes waiting hours — to cast mail ballots in person, it is a clear sign that Pennsylvanians want and need true early in-person voting.

The current practice of applying for and submitting mail ballots on-site is a workaround, not a solution. It is cumbersome and confusing and strains election workers, which we saw in Bucks County in the days leading up to the 2024 presidential election.

A robust early voting system should include: multiple voting locations in every county, extended evening and weekend hours, adequate staffing and training and consistent standards across counties to ensure equity.

The benefits of a system like this are clear. States like Michigan, which implemented early in-person voting in 2024, saw 58% of voters cast ballots before Election Day — compared with just 27% in Pennsylvania.

Early voting improves access, reduces long lines, and helps prevent the kinds of Election Day issues, like long lines, that undermine voter confidence.

It also makes economic sense. When voters can choose when and where to vote, we reduce workplace disruptions and prevent low-wage workers from having to sacrifice a paycheck to cast a ballot.

Voting should not be a privilege of those who have flexible time — time in the middle of their day to avoid lines, paid time off, or the ability to start work late or leave early — it is a fundamental right that everyone should be able to exercise.

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania believes in a democracy that is inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all. Implementing early in-person voting is a crucial step toward realizing that vision. As the birthplace of American democracy, which we are preparing to celebrate on July 4, 2026, Pennsylvania should lead — not lag behind—on making voting accessible for every eligible citizen.

The time to act is now. Legislators must prioritize a modern, responsive voting system that ensures all Pennsylvanians have the opportunity to make their voices heard — safely, securely, and conveniently.