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## **Keystone Votes Coalition Report Indicates Thousands of Lost or Late Voter Registration Records in 2016**

*17,000 late processed applications found in Philadelphia alone*

**PHILADELPHIA, PA (June 5, 2017)** – A new report released by Keystone Votes, a nonpartisan coalition of 39 organizations, has found evidence of widespread problems in the processing of voter registration (VR) applications across the Commonwealth in 2016 and especially in Philadelphia County. The report highlights two problems: **1)** massive numbers of applications processed late – within eight days of polls opening on November 8; and **2)** applications that were misprocessed or lost entirely.

Data from the Pennsylvania Department of State indicates that nearly 56,000 total VR applications were processed late, 17,000 of them – nearly a third – were in Philadelphia. These voters were unlikely to have received a Voter Registration Card in the mail by Election Day (which tells the voter their polling location and confirms that the voter is registered) or to be listed in the main poll book. Either circumstance may have created challenges for voters on Election Day, and the former may be a violation of state election law.

“The thousands of hardcopy applications submitted in presidential election years creates a real challenge for election officials,” Seventy staffer Patrick Christmas acknowledged. “But the challenge isn’t new. How many problems in elections and voter registration must Philadelphians endure before substantive and long-lasting reform takes hold?”

According to the report, 3.8 percent of valid, on-time VR applications submitted in Philadelphia were processed late, the highest rate of any county in the state and 8.5 times greater than the statewide

average: 0.4 percent. The next most populous county, Allegheny, processed only 386 applications within eight days of Election Day, a late-processing rate of only 0.2 percent.

The Keystone Votes report also found evidence to suggest a significant number of VR applications were misprocessed or lost by election officials after being received. According to an investigation into a sample of 500 voter registration forms submitted in 2016, as many as one in ten voters in Philadelphia who had submitted applications could not be found on the rolls. Most striking were the experiences of three separate organizations in Philadelphia county who determined voter registration applications had not been processed months after their submission.

The Philadelphia City Commissioners' Office acknowledged to Asian Americans United (AAU) that a batch of 37 VR applications submitted to their office in person could not be found, causing a City Commissioner staffer to request that AAU provide photocopies so that the applications could be processed.

"Volunteers with Asian Americans United's Chinatown Vote project work hard year-round to ensure that new and English-language-learning citizens are able to cast their ballots despite the many challenges new voters confront at every step of our inefficient and inadequate election processes," said Wei Chen, AAU Civic Engagement Coordinator. "But to go through the hurdles required to register to vote and to show up at the polls only to be turned away because one has not made it on to the rolls is an injustice. We need election process reform, and we need it now."

Project HOME and the Penn Law American Constitution Society (ACS) also encountered problems, identifying a significant number of voters who submitted complete VR applications and who could not be found on the voter rolls months later. Having also kept photocopies of VR applications completed and turned over to the City Commissioners, Project HOME found that more than one in five (29 of 131) were lost or misprocessed.

Penn Law ACS determined a similar problem had occurred with 13 of the 83 applications they submitted, while also learning from the City Commissioners that nearly 50,000 of 200,000 new VR applications received in Philadelphia throughout 2016 were not entered into the state's voter registration system. Although applications can be lawfully rejected for a variety of reasons, the VR rejection rate in Philadelphia – nearly one in four – is twice that of the statewide average: 12 percent.

"Many students were denied the right to vote by the actions of the Voter Registration Office. These students registered to vote, and then found out they were unable to cast a ballot on Election Day because the Voter Registration Office either incorrectly entered their information or completely lost

their registration form. Disturbingly, this problem appears to be widespread in Philadelphia. The status quo in election oversight and administration in our city is clearly not working and we must reform the system before we have another election where Philadelphians are prevented from voting.”

See the full report – *Lost and Late in 2016: Why thousands of Pennsylvanians weren’t able to cast a ballot at their poll on Election Day* – at: [www.keystonevotes.org/newsroom](http://www.keystonevotes.org/newsroom).

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The Better Philadelphia Elections Coalition, a nonpartisan coalition of 14 organizations, is advocating for the replacement of the Office of the City Commissioners with appointed and experienced professionals to oversee, administer and modernize Philadelphia’s elections. The coalition is calling on City Council to create a new Department of Elections led by a professionally-accredited Election Director appointed by the Mayor with oversight provided by an appointed, non-salaried and bipartisan Philadelphia Board of Elections.

Americans for Democratic Action | Asian Americans United | Committee of Seventy | Disability Rights Pennsylvania  
Economy League of Greater Philadelphia | Fifth Square | Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce  
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