



LUZERNE COUNTY
COUNTY MANAGER
C. DAVID PEDRI, ESQUIRE

COUNTY of LUZERNE
P E N N S Y L V A N I A
E S T A B L I S H E D 1 7 8 6

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Luzerne County's Response to the Requested Investigation of UMOVA Ballots

Luzerne County, Pennsylvania (September 25, 2020)

1. The Luzerne County Elections Bureau began transmitting Uniformed Military and Overseas Voters Act (UMOVA) ballots for the November 2020 general election on August 25, 2020 in accordance with the Pennsylvania Department of State 2020 Election Calendar. UMOVA ballots are provided to US citizens living aboard and military voters.
2. The Luzerne County Elections Bureau has a longstanding practice of adding temporary seasonal independent contractors to assist with office tasks in the months leading up to an election.
3. One individual was contracted to assist with the 2020 General Election as a temporary seasonal independent contractor and began work on Monday, September 14, 2020. This contractor was assigned to sort the mail received by the Elections Bureau.
4. During the afternoon of Wednesday, September 16, 2020 it was discovered by Luzerne County Elections Director Shelby Watchilla, that this contractor incorrectly discarded into the office trash UMOVA ballots. Ms. Watchilla immediately began an internal inquiry and informed her direct supervisor.
5. The temporary independent contractor was removed from service and informed not to return.
6. After the internal inquiry was completed, Ms. Watchilla contacted Luzerne County Office of Law who researched the matter and advised that this needed to be reported to the authorities. An official request was immediately made by County staff to the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office for investigation and assistance.
7. All garbage from the Elections Bureau from Monday, September 14 through Wednesday September 16 (the time period when this independent contractor was present on County property) was placed in a dumpster and secured by Luzerne County staff. Each bag of garbage from the entire building in the dumpster was searched by the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office, Pennsylvania State Police as well as Luzerne County staff. All items of concern were taken into custody by the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

8. Luzerne County Elections staff were unaware for whom the ballots were cast until the disclosure via Press Release of the United States Attorney on September 24, 2020.
9. Upon return of the ballots currently held by the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the County will attempt to contact the voters involved and process their votes. The County encourages all individuals who have already mailed their UMOVA ballots back to Luzerne County to check their ballot status at the Pennsylvania Department of State website (www.dos.pa.gov).
10. Elections Bureau Director Shelby Watchilla discovered the activity listed above and initiated this investigation. The County is fully cooperating with the investigation and thanks the US Attorney's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Pennsylvania State Police and the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office for their professional work.
11. Luzerne County will be providing supplemental extensive training to both full time staff and temporary seasonal independent contractors and has a security camera in the Elections Bureau to actively monitor and ensure that all staff are strictly adhering to proper procedures and protocols. The Pennsylvania Department of State has also been contacted to provide additional assistance regarding training and best practices.
12. Mail in ballots for the general public are on track to be mailed out starting on October 5, 2020. All additional training and updates for staff will be completed by that date.

While the actions of this individual has cast a concern, the above statement shows that the system of checks and balances set forth in Pennsylvania elections works. An error was made, a public servant discovered it and reported it to law enforcement at the local, State and Federal level who took over to ensure the integrity of the system in place.

The Luzerne County voters should be assured that the election will move forward with transparency and integrity. Every properly cast vote will be counted.

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