I am Susan Carty, President of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. I sincerely welcome this opportunity to address the issue of removing obstacles to voting and improving the voting experience.

The League is a 93-year old organization that has worked tirelessly to ensure that ALL voters have equal opportunity and equal access to registration and to “barrier free” ballots.

We meet here today in Philadelphia, proudly referred to as the Birthplace of American Democracy. Holding this esteemed and profound place in history, we in Pennsylvania urge you to support model best practices for election systems, not only nationally but globally.

As you know, the question of government photo voter ID in order to vote is controversial here in Pennsylvania, with our courts still considering whether the legislatively adopted requirements are acceptable according to our Constitution. Whatever one’s views on ID requirements, however, it is abundantly clear from the Pennsylvania experience that such requirements do not make the administration of elections any easier. At the least, they add confusion and expense to our election systems.

The League does support moves to a secure online voter registration system and offer more accessible, efficient and economical registration opportunities for the voter, including portable statewide voter registration. We continue to strongly recommend the extension of election hours and early voting.

Money saved could be better spent by making ALL polling places accessible, upgrading or replacing aging voting equipment and buying electronic poll books.
These recommendations would also simplify the administrative process for election officials as well as helping voters make sure their information is up-to-date.

The League understands that voter information and education is critical. Voters must know their rights and responsibilities. A Voters Bill of Rights should be posted at every polling place. Programs encouraging high school and college students to be poll watchers would be highly recommended.

We support education designed with the intent to expand understanding of the voting process, education that provides clarity in procedure and education that encourages all voters to actively pursue their fundamental right to vote.

For years our member volunteers have staffed telephone hotlines in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and elsewhere to help voters overcome Election Day problems. We have heard it all. Polling places that were not open on time, voters told to come back later because the only voting machine was out of order, poorly marked-hard to find-inaccessible polling places, voters whose names were not on the rolls and refused an opportunity to cast a provisional ballot, and long lines.

Clearly we need improvements in our election systems, and we welcome your interest in our views on needed reforms.

I thank you and the LWVPA thanks you with the following quote:

The Right to Vote provides the Foundation that makes All other rights possible!