

PA DEPARTMENT OF STATE BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Tuesday, February 25, 2025



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Department of State (DOS) Secretary Al Schmidt and senior DOS staff testified before the House Appropriations Committee this morning. House Republicans focused questions on issues related to Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), concerns about the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors (SURE) system, and improving the professional licensure process.

Key Takeaways:

- The DOS Secretary stated that Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) should not be applied to vehicle registration.
 - There have been multiple reports of individuals having their voter registration changed based solely on a vehicle registration update through PennDOT. On the record, the DOS denied this is happening. This issue requires further legislative inquiry into how and why this has happened and whether it is still happening.
 - In September 2024, the Supreme Court ruled that PennDOT and DOS had no statutory authority to link voter registration to vehicle registration. This ruling has significant implications for the future of voter registration policies in Pennsylvania.
 - The DOS could not provide a cost-savings estimate for the AVR program, a lack of transparency that raises questions about the program's financial implications. The governor claimed there would be cost savings, but the administration apparently cannot quantify them.
- Committee members inquired about updates to the SURE system and if the state has recovered funds from a contractor who is no longer working on the update. DOS testimony revealed that refunds have not been received for monies paid prior to the beginning of the Shapiro Administration.
- DOS could not quantify the costs of special elections but confirmed that the most cost-efficient way to conduct them is in conjunction with primary and general elections.
- While professional licensure wait times have improved, members pressed DOS to do more to help licensees with questions about scope of practice and general compliance questions.
- During the 2024 election, many voters received a third-party mailer that included Governor Shapiro's signature that was designed to look like official government mail urging them to visit "vote.pa," a website run by a political electioneering organization designed to impersonate the official government site "vote.pa.gov." This issue raised concerns about voter manipulation and the need for transparency among government and non-government entities. DOS agreed that platforms like "vote.pa" should do more to differentiate themselves from official government websites, agreeing that the mailers with the governor's signature were misleading.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Eric Davanzo was informed by the DOS secretary that AVR should not apply to vehicle registration. However, several examples of voter registration changes through vehicle registration updates have occurred.



Rep. Kristin Marcell questions DOS on how it is working to ensure voters know when third parties are attempting to collect their information under the guise of voter registration or mail-in ballot applications.