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Montco takes action to increase access to voter ID

Schwenksville, PA (September 20, 2012) – The Montgomery County Commissioners Thursday night voted unanimously to assist registered county voters in getting an acceptable identification for voting.

The resolution passed by the commissioners authorizes Parkhouse, the county’s senior care center to issue picture IDs to county residents that will fulfill the state identification requirements at the polls.

David Robinson, an assistant solicitor for the county, explained at the commissioners meeting that the Pennsylvania Voter ID law designates five authorized issuers of ID cards including Pennsylvania care facilities. Robinson said that the statute specifically limits municipalities to only issuing cards to its employees, but the law imposes no limitation on the remaining four authorized issuers.

“A strict reading of the law clearly authorizes a Pennsylvania care facility, such as Parkhouse, to issue voter ID cards to any registered voter,” Robinson said.

Commission Chair Josh Shapiro hailed the action. “I continually hear from voters who are having trouble securing a proper ID card to vote,” he said. “While my opposition to the Voter ID law is well-documented, I took an oath to uphold all of the laws. Tonight’s unanimous decision by our board, simply ensures the rights of eligible Montgomery County voters. I realize that this does not solve the problem across the Commonwealth but it is an important step in the right direction for our constituents in Montgomery County.”

Commissioner Leslie Richards has been closely overseeing the county’s adherence to the Voter ID law as the chair of the county’s Election Board. “Despite my belief that the Voter ID law is bad and unnecessary legislation, we have been focused on ensuring that our election officials carry out the law as directed, while at the same time trying to make sure that any eligible voter who wants to vote can do so,” Richards said. “This action tonight is simply another step, albeit a large one, in making sure that happens.”
Commissioner Bruce Castor’s support of the action came from a slightly different direction. “After spending more than two decades as a prosecutor,” said the former Montgomery County District Attorney, “I am all about the law. The Pennsylvania Voter ID law permits this course of action, I believe we are following the law and making it as easy as possible to obtain voter ID.”

Assistant Solicitor Robinson agreed and also said that the commissioners’ action is in concert with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court order last week to Commonwealth Court that voters have liberal access to voter ID cards, and that the Commonwealth not be imposing stricter or more rigorous rules for obtaining the voter ID cards than is contemplated by the Voter ID Law.

“Parkhouse’s issuance of voter ID cards helps achieve both of the Court’s goals.” Robinson said. “First, it helps to assure that Montgomery County voters have liberal access to voter ID cards. Second, a Commonwealth challenge to Parkhouse’s right to issue voter ID cards would arguably be an attempt to impose stricter rules than are contemplated by the statute, a direct violation of the express mandate of the Supreme Court.”

The commissioners said that details about the voter ID program would be released shortly, but that implementation would start October 1.