

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COMMISSIONERS
FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET TESTIMONY
MAY 26, 2020**

Good Afternoon President Clarke and Members of City Council. I am Commissioner Lisa Deeley, Chairwoman of the City Commissioners. Joining me today are Commissioners Al Schmidt and Omar Sabir, Deputy Commissioners Nick Custodio, Seth Bluestein, and Jenne Ayers and Budget Officer Lisa Coleman. I am pleased to provide testimony on the Office of the City Commissioners' Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget.

The proposed Fiscal Year 2021 General Fund budget totals \$12,229,691, which funds our department at FY20 levels. This is a decrease of \$10,248,844 from our original proposed budget. In the last fiscal year, we have had significant increases in our operating costs, primarily due to the recent passage of Act 77 of 2019 and Act 12 of 2020, the continued work associated with implementing a new voting system, and the increased workload due to the Presidential General Election occurring in the second quarter of FY21.

We understand that the newly proposed budget is a COVID budget and that the city is unsure of what revenue will look like and what financial resources will be coming from the state and federal governments. But, please know that the cost of running elections has dramatically increased and we will likely not have the funds to make it through FY21. Therefore, we would like to ask that you please consider revisiting our budget in the first or second quarters of FY21 when more information about the city's fiscal health is known.

FY20 saw dramatic changes for our department from Harrisburg. Act 77 of 2019 and Act 12 of 2020 made some of the biggest changes to the Election Code in generations, which will go into effect for the upcoming Primary and General Elections. The deadline to register to vote is now 15 days before Election Day, rather than 30 days. While this greatly expands the opportunity for the public to register to vote, it also means major changes to our processes. Previously, we had 13 days to process voter registrations to make the poll book, and 25 days to process registrations to make the supplemental poll sheets. We now have just 10 days to process all the registrations just to make the supplemental poll sheets.

The new law also creates an entirely new and separate method of voting. While in many ways it is similar to Absentee Voting, it is legally distinct. Voters can apply for a mail-in ballot without providing a reason or excuse. It was fortuitous that this is available now during this pandemic as it offers voters an opportunity to exercise their right to vote from the safety of their own homes. To further allow for voters to stay home, we provided prepaid return postage, so they do not have to go out and buy stamps. The deadline to apply for an absentee or mail-in ballot is today at 5pm. So far we have processed XXX,XXX (we will update on the morning of) absentee and mail-in applications. For comparison purposes, we received 16,101 applications for the 2012 General, 15,887 for the 2016 General, and 5,742 for the 2016 Primary. I would like to thank Council President Clarke and all the members of council who worked with us to produce radio ads to promote the vote by mail option for the primary.

The over 30 times increase in applications from 4 years ago has exceeded what our staff can do on their own, but thanks to additional staffing assistance from Council, the Kenney Administration, the First Judicial District, the Parking Authority, the Sheriff, the Controller, and the District Attorney, we have been able to keep up with the demand up to today. However, if there is a fall COVID spike, applications for the General Election might exceed 400 to 500 thousand and we will have to explore ways to process all of them timely.

In addition to the mail, we have set up a ballot dropbox outside our City Hall office and are working with District Council members for Primary Day dropoff locations in each council districts. This is all in an effort to get as many ballots returned to us by the 8pm, June 2nd deadline.

We have also had to consolidate the polling places for the June 2nd Primary. Instead of the 831 polling places we had last November, when it was all our turn to be on the ballot, we will have 190 locations. We will be sending a postcard to every voter's household with their polling location, ads will be run in the newspapers this week, and our Polling Place finder app on our website has been updated. Voters who choose to vote in-person can go to Polling Places dot Philadelphia Votes dot com and type in their address to find their polling place for the upcoming election.

For the June 2nd Primary, the Department of State will be providing us with packs of PPE for the polling places. These PPE packs consist of large containers with hundreds of disinfectant antibacterial wipes, protective gloves, FDA approved surgical masks for poll workers, micro poll worker hand sanitizer kits, voter handheld sanitizer pump bottle, isopropyl alcohol screen wipes, microfiber cloths, sanitary headset covers, and a roll of floor tape for maintaining social distancing. In addition, we will provide every voter with a plastic glove to use when signing the poll book and voting on the touch screen. While we cannot deny any voter their right to vote based on mask usage, but for the health and safety of our poll workers and other voters we strongly encourage voters to wear a mask. If a voter arrives without a mask, we will provide them with one.

Another big change from last fiscal year was the successful rollout of a new voting system with a voter verifiable paper ballot. This success was thanks to the hard work of hundreds of city employees across multiple city departments. Leading up to last year's General Election, our department trained thousands of poll workers, held over 800 education events, and communicated with thousands of Philadelphians so the citizens of Philadelphia could be as prepared as possible to transition to the new paper-based voting system. I know there were some who questioned the rush to debut the new system in November, but we are very fortunate that we did. Imagine the chaos of trying to implement a new system in a Presidential year AND during a pandemic.

In addition to the additional expenses due to Acts 77 and 12, the implementation of the new voting system has added significant ongoing costs to our budget in material, shipping, and labor costs. For instance, just the new paper ballots cost us \$190,000 a year. The process to get those paper ballots returned at the end of the night requires renting 150 vehicles and engaging personnel in multiple city Departments, something that we did not need to do with the old DRE machines. The new voting equipment has a more involved pre-election testing that takes longer to complete and

ship than the old Danaher voting machines, so it requires additional staff at the warehouse. They ship in a different manner than the Danahers so our shipping costs have increased.

We have continued to prioritize the values of diversity and inclusion in making sure the demographics of our department reflect the citizens we serve. As of December 2019, our demographics were: 43 African American, 45 White, 3 Hispanic, 2 Asian, and 2 Other. To meet the increased staffing needs created by the new voting system and the changes in the Election Code, we began an aggressive effort to increase our staff by 63 people, but we were only able to get to half of that before the City shutdown. We will need to resume that this summer in order to have enough people to process the increased number of mail-in applications and voter registrations in the shortened time frame this November.

During these unprecedented times, managing a Presidential election year in the midst of a global pandemic, we are committed to protecting and supporting the votes of every citizen of Philadelphia. We appreciate this opportunity to present our testimony and are happy to answer any questions you have at this time.