

**CITY COMMISSIONERS  
FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET TESTIMONY  
APRIL 25, 2021**

Good morning, President Clarke and Members of City Council. I am Commissioner Lisa Deeley, Chairwoman of the Philadelphia City Commissioners. Joining me today are Deputy Commissioner Nick Custodio and Budget Officer Brian Miracle. I am pleased to provide testimony on the Office of the City Commissioners' Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget.

First, before I begin, I would like to take a moment of personal privilege to express just how sad I am that this will be my last budget testimony where I will start with 'Good morning, President Clarke'. Through multiple mayoral administrations and difficult times in this city, it has been Darrell Clarke's steadfast leadership of this council that has seen us through. Specifically, when it comes to elections in Philadelphia, a lot of people are quick to flock to the limelight when the big elections come. They stand next to me when the national media is in town. But those who follow these things closely know, that we would not even have elections in this city if I did not have Council President Clarke in my corner the other 50 weeks of the year. So, thank you Council President and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

We are here to request \$29,867,275 to fund our operations for Fiscal Year 2024. This request includes \$12,796,957 in Class 100, for employee compensation, \$14,390,101 in Class 200, for professional service contracts, election board payroll, and polling place rentals, \$1,217,106 in Class 300, for materials and office supplies, and \$ 1,463,111 in Class 400, for computers, furniture, and equipment.

The budget proposed by the administration underfunds our department by \$749,625. This is mostly in Class 100, for employee compensation. Since we are experiencing the same difficulties as other departments in filling all of our open positions, we are not contesting the administration's proposal, but I wanted to state this on the record in case we have to come back for a mid-year transfer.

Even though we have still not had the mayoral primary, the presidential election looms close in the future, and we are preparing now, really we have been preparing since December 2020. Fiscal Year 2024 contains the municipal general election this November and the 2024 Presidential Primary next spring. The 2020 Primary occurred at the height of the pandemic and required polling place consolidation. Still, we had a turnout of 32.4% with 348,944 voters casting their ballot. Looking back to a pre-pandemic election, the 2016 Presidential Primary had a turnout of 40% with 411,697 votes. This November, we not only have the mayor, the row offices, city council, and city judicial races but we also have the statewide judicial races, which have been extremely competitive and close as of late. The 2021 commonwealth court race went to a statewide recount. There is also a Pennsylvania Supreme Court seat on the ballot. Around the country, supreme court races, in this current political environment, are extremely contentious.

## OFFICE OF THE CITY COMMISSIONERS

The supreme court election in Wisconsin, earlier this month, saw an estimated combined spending of \$40 million. So, we are getting ready for a hectic time.

Mail-in voting is growing in popularity and as a result we are seeing higher turnouts. But as you know, the advent of mail-in voting has come at a great expense to counties around the commonwealth and though the state started to provide funds last year and we hope they continue to do so, the funds are limited to certain categories and do not cover all the additional costs which comes with running modern elections.

One category that the state grant does cover is Election Board worker pay. This past year, because of the grant, we raised the Election Board worker and bilingual interpreter pay to the maximum allowed by law and increased the training stipend to \$50. While it was not a magic wand solution to the nationwide Election Board worker shortage, we recruited 7963 Election Board workers in the 2022 General Election and 7973 in the comparable 2018 Midterm Election. But antidotally, the raise has helped retain the workers that we would have lost, and they feel appreciated that we are finally paying them a fair wage for the 13 plus hours they work on election days. But if the state were to cut or eliminate the funding then that is a cost that either the city would have to absorb, or the Philadelphia Board of Elections will have to adjust the pay rate.

Thanks to the funds that this council appropriated to us, we have begun to expand our staff. We have created an IT unit, public engagement and language access unit, electronic pollbook unit, and expanded the vote by mail and election board units. In addition, we are hiring additional middle management to provide greater oversight and project management, and communications staff.

Our new GIS Director is injecting modern mapping technology into our elections. We can now provide the public with more mapping based visualizations of election data, like with the maps we published last fall of undated and incorrectly dated mail ballots by race, education, poverty status, and more. He is also working with the city's GIS software vendor, ESRI, to leverage their full suite of GIS products, which the city already pays for, to support our elections, preventing a need to purchase new products. One such example is that we will be using the ESRI suite to support our election day trouble ticketing and tech dispatch using a smart phone app which will push tickets directly to the techs with more information and directions to the polling place. Not all that dissimilar to what you see your Uber driver using. This will replace the old system of radios and excel spreadsheets. We are pushing the vendor into the development of new features which will put us at the tip of the spear in the use of GIS powered technology for elections. Once again, using existing software that the city already pays for. Other cities will be looking to us for ideas to copy.

We are also now on the cutting edge of mobile networking. As part of our electronic poll book project, our IT staff has shared with other city departments the network in a box solution which allows the tablets to synchronize the voter check-in data. Now, this core technology is being used to quickly install cameras by the streets department to crack down on short dumping. As you all

## OFFICE OF THE CITY COMMISSIONERS

know, with fixed cameras, the dumpers would just move to another site where there was no camera. Now, thanks to the technology that we introduced to the city, streets can just move the mobile short dumping camera on short notice to their new site.

In August, we launched our new website, [Vote.Phila.gov](http://Vote.Phila.gov). The new website is not just a name change, it is a complete redesign. The new site replaced the former website that was over ten years old. The new site is optimized for mobile devices, built on the Phila.gov platform so security will be monitored and maintained by OIT. It has also been adjusted to better accommodate the visually impaired and has a sleek modern look and feel. The new site moves the commissioners from a dot-com domain to a more secure and trusted dot-gov domain, which was a key recommendation by Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). We are working with OIT on phase two which will add even more functionality along with a companion mobile app.

We have also brought back 215-686-VOTE as the official number for all things elections in Philadelphia.

As you know, we have been trying to replace our paper pollbooks with electronic pollbooks for many years now. They were supposed to be deployed for the first time in the 2019 General Election, but we have a high bar to meet for testing the equipment and they are finally ready to go this election. Electronic pollbooks will allow for faster and more efficient voter check-ins at polling places and for voters to look up their correct polling place if they are in the wrong location. It will also shave several days off of the counting of mail ballots, as it will allow the staff to quickly cross reference the ballots that arrived closer to election day to ensure that those voters did not vote in person, a key step that we take to ensure accurate election results. It will allow Philadelphia to implement new voting changes such as same day registration and true early voting, if we can get that out of Harrisburg. The Election Board workers received additional hands-on training last fall and again this winter, as well as reviewing it during the normal training seminars. While this is a big change for the Election Board workers, it is a minimal change for the voters. The only difference is before when they signed in on a paper book, they will now sign on a tablet, just like when you pay for a coffee at Dunkin.

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 2022, our demographics were: 61 white, 79 minority, 64 females. The demographics of our recent hires are: 5 minority, and 4 white.

Our department's OEO goal for M/W/DBE contracts is 15%. Our department's current level is 15%.

Language access continues to be a prime focus and we have hired a Chinese Language Access & Engagement Specialist and in the near future will be hiring a Spanish Language Access & Engagement Specialist to translate, engage with the community, and improve our section 203 commitments. Currently our staff contains four staffers who speak Spanish, one who speaks

## OFFICE OF THE CITY COMMISSIONERS

Malayalam, one who speaks Malayalam and Hindi, one who speaks Urdu and Hindi, one who speaks Spanish and Italian, one who speaks Albanian and Italian, one who speaks Bengali, and one who speaks Mandarin-Chinese and Taigu. I am very proud that this list has grown in the last few years from just Spanish to the laundry list which I presented today, and we will continue to grow the list out as part of our commitment to language access. In the last year, we passed a motion to expand language access and services in the additional languages of Russian, Vietnamese, Khmer, Arabic, Haitian-Creole, and Portuguese. In the 2022 General Election, we rolled out additional 'I Voted' stickers in these six additional languages and voters this primary will see a new 'Vote Here' sign in 9 languages.

Lastly, thanks to this council's recognition of our needs and appropriation of the funds needed to outfit our election warehouse and ballot processing center, progress has finally been made. Phase 1 which included camera and security upgrades, rehabbing the office area, fit outs for the electronic poll book storage and programming, and a modern, secure, and dignified hearing room was completed before the 2022 General. We are now proceeding to the next phases which are slated for completion in time for the 2024 Presidential General. This should provide us with the best and most secure location to conduct the presidential election and present the City of Philadelphia in the best way to the world.

Wrapping up, I would just like to take a moment before I finish to thank our dedicated staff who work, every day, on-site and were one of the first departments to return to the office in the city. Without them there are no elections. I would also like to thank Judges Crumlish, Johnson, and Furlong who, per the Election Code, are sitting on the board of elections and actually running the 2023 elections while us commissioners are on the ballot.

I appreciate this opportunity to present our testimony and we are happy to answer any questions you have at this time.