

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

1191 C.D. 2020

IN RE: CANVASS OF ABSENTEE AND/OR MAIL-IN BALLOTS

**APPLICATION FOR EXPEDITED TREATMENT AND SUMMARY
RELIEF BY DONALD J. TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT, INC.**

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**APPLICATION FOR EXPEDITED TREATMENT AND SUMMARY
RELIEF BY DONALD J. TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT, INC.**

Appellant Donald J. Trump for President, Inc. (“Appellant”), by its undersigned counsel, hereby requests this Honorable Court grant expedited treatment and summary relief with regard to the within matter and states as follows:

1. On the same day, November 19, 2020, that the Trial Court issued its Memorandum and Order from which the undersigned appeals in the instant matter, the Commonwealth Court issued a Memorandum Opinion that addressed a virtually identical issue.

2. Attached as Exhibit 1 is a true and correct copy of the Memorandum and Order of the Trial Court dated November 19, 2020 in the matter of In re: Canvass of Absentee and/or Mail-In Ballots of November 3, 2020 General Election, Petition of Donald J. Trump for President, et al, that is the subject of the instant appeal.

3. Attached as Exhibit 2 is a true and correct copy of the Commonwealth Court Memorandum Opinion Dated November 19, 2020 in the matter of In Re: 2,349 Ballots in the 2020 General Election, Appeal of Nicole Ziccarelli, No: 1162 CD 2020, which was the result of an appeal from the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas (the “Allegheny Appeal”).

4. In both the Allegheny Appeal and the instant appeal, at issue are absentee and mail-in ballots that are defective on their face and should not be counted under the Pennsylvania Election Code.

5. These issues were fully briefed in the Allegheny Appeal. Attached as Exhibit 3 is a true and correct copy of the docket in that matter.

6. The statutory deadline by which most counties must certify the results of their elections to the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is Monday, November 23, 2020.

7. “The integrity of the election process required immediate resolution of disputes that prevent certification.” *In re 2003 Election for Jackson Twp. Supervisor*, 840 A.2d 1044, 1046 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2003) (Kelly, S.J.).

8. In the interest of conserving judicial resources, and considering the exigency of election matters, good cause exists for the Commonwealth Court to grant summary relief without briefing or further filings by the parties.

WHEREFORE, Appellant asks this Court to grant summary adjudication on an expedited basis and rely on the Memorandum Opinion dated November 19, 2020 in the matter of *In Re: 2, 349 Ballots in the 2020 General Election*, No. 1162 C.D. 2020.

Date: November 23, 2020

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Linda A. Kerns

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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I certify that this filing complies with the provisions of the *Case Records Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania* that require filing confidential information and documents differently than non-confidential information and documents.

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PROOF OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on the 23rd day of November, 2020, a true and correct copies of the foregoing Brief were served upon the persons and in the manner indicated below which service satisfies the requirements of Pa.R.A.P. 121:

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Case# 2020-05786-26 - JUDGE:35 Received at County of Bucks Prothonotary on 11/19/2020 4:14 PM. Fee = \$0.00. The filer certifies that this filing complies with the provisions of the Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania: Case Records of the Appellate and Trial Courts that require filing confidential information and documents differently than non-confidential information and documents.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
CIVIL DIVISION

IN RE: CANVASS OF ABSENTEE AND/OR :
MAIL-IN BALLOTS OF NOVEMBER 3, 2020 : No. 20-05786-35
GENERAL ELECTION :
PETITION OF DONALD J. TRUMP FOR :
PRESIDENT, ET AL. :

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

I. Introduction

The above captioned matter is before the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas pursuant to §§ 3146.8 and 3157(a) of the Pennsylvania Election Code. 25 P.S. §§ 3146.8, 3157(a). Petitioners are asking the Court to reverse the Decision of the Bucks County Board of Elections relevant to certain ballots which were received by the Board of Election as part of the General Election which took place November 3, 2020. The Petitioners are Petitioner Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.¹; Petitioner Republican National Committee²; Petitioner

¹ Petitioner Donald J. Trump for President, Inc. is the principle committee for the reelection campaign of Donald J. Trump, the forty-fifth President of the United States of America. Petitioner Donald J. Trump for President, Inc. is bringing this action for itself and on behalf of its candidate President Trump.

² Petitioner Republican National Committee is the national political committee that leads the Republican Party of the United States. It works to elect Republican candidates to State and Federal Offices throughout the United States, including the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Petitioner Republican National Committee is bringing this action for itself and on behalf of the Republican Party, all of its members, all registered Republican voters, and all nominated Republican candidates in the November 3, 2020 General Election in Pennsylvania.

N.B. It is the responsibility of all parties to notify all interested parties of the content of this order.

Exhibit 1

Heidelbaugh for Attorney General, Inc.³; and Petitioner Garrity for PA⁴. This matter has also been improperly captioned as "Donald J. Trump for President, Inc., et al. vs. Bucks County Board of Elections". The Respondent is the Bucks County Board of Elections⁵ (hereinafter referred to as "Board"). Parties also include the Democratic National Committee⁶, the Bucks County Democratic Committee⁷, and the Pennsylvania House Democratic Campaign Committee⁸; these parties were permitted to intervene without objection.

³ Petitioner Heidelbaugh for Attorney General, Inc. is the principal committee for the election campaign of Heather Heidelbaugh for the office of Attorney General of Pennsylvania. Heidelbaugh is the Republican candidate for the office of Attorney General of Pennsylvania in the November 3, 2020 General Election. Petitioner Heidelbaugh for Attorney General, Inc. is bringing this action for itself and on behalf of its candidate.

⁴ Petitioner Garrity for PA is the principle committee for the election campaign of Stacy L. Garrity for the Office of Treasurer of Pennsylvania. Stacy L. Garrity is the Republican candidate for the office of the Treasurer of Pennsylvania in the Election of November 3, 2020. Petitioner Garrity for PA is bringing this action for itself and on behalf of its candidate.

⁵ Respondent Bucks County Board of Elections is responsible for overseeing the conduct of elections in Bucks County, including the administration of the pre-canvass and canvass sessions of the Board during which absentee and mail-in ballots were opened, reviewed, and counted, as required by the Election Code.

⁶ The Democratic National Committee is a national committee dedicated to electing local, state, and national candidates of the Democratic Party to public office throughout the United States, including Pennsylvania. The Democratic National Committee has members who submitted absentee and mail-in ballots in the November 3, 2020 General Election.

⁷ The Bucks County Democratic Committee is a local committee with a mission of electing qualified members of the Democratic Party to local office at all levels of government. The Bucks County Democratic Committee has members and constituents across Bucks County who submitted absentee and mail-in ballots in Bucks County in the November 3, 2020 General Election.

⁸ The Pennsylvania House Democratic Campaign Committee is a state committee dedicated to electing local members of the Democratic Party to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The Pennsylvania House Democratic Campaign Committee has members and constituents who submitted absentee and mail-in ballots in Bucks County in the November 3, 2020 General Election.

In this appeal, Petitioners argue⁹ that the Board violated State Law when it failed to reject certain specific ballots, and over objection, accepted the ballots as valid votes of Bucks County citizens. The Respondent, as part of its statutory duties, sorted through and reviewed approximately 165,000 total absentee and mail-in ballots. In this process, the Respondent Board deemed a total of 918 ballots to be legally insufficient, and therefore, those specific ballots were not canvassed; in other words, the ballots were rejected. These ballots were not rejected because there was a finding that the person submitting the ballot was not authorized to vote, but rather because of some deficiency required by the Election Code, such as a lack of signature or a lack of privacy envelope.

The actual vote offered on any of those rejected ballots is unknown. Whether or not a specific vote on any of those ballots would be for or against any of the Petitioner candidates, or their opponents is unknown. There are 2,177 ballots are at issue in this case being challenged by the Petitioners.

This decision will be abbreviated because of time constraints caused by the need for a prompt resolution of the issues presented to allow for certification of votes. Should an appeal be filed the Court reserves the right to supplement this Memorandum with additional facts and law¹⁰.

⁹ On the day of the hearing, Petitioners were solely represented by Britain R. Henry, Esquire. Other attorneys had entered their appearance and represent all the Petitioners for purposes of the record. Attorney Henry confirmed that he had the authority to speak for all Petitioners, but that he was proceeding primarily on behalf of Petitioner Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.

¹⁰ While drafting this Memorandum and Order, the Court has learned that the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has Exercised Extraordinary Jurisdiction over the some of the Commonwealth Courts cases with respect to Election Code issues similar to the ones at issue herein. In Order to expedite the completion of this Memorandum and Order, this

After careful deliberation and study of the relevant statutory and appellate case law, the undersigned is confident that the final decision is correct. However, the electorate and the various county boards of elections would benefit from clear precise legislation on the subjects presented in this appeal. It must be noted that the parties specifically stipulated in their comprehensive stipulation of facts that there exists no evidence of any fraud, misconduct, or any impropriety with respect to the challenged ballots. There is nothing in the record and nothing alleged that would lead to the conclusion that any of the challenged ballots were submitted by someone not qualified or entitled to vote in this election. At no time did Petitioners present evidence or argument to the contrary. The challenges are all to form rather than substance but premised on specific statutory language which Petitioners argue supported the issues presented. There is insufficient time for this Court to construct a comprehensive response to all issues raised but hopefully this decision will provide an explanation for the Court's reasoning.

II. Undisputed factual record

Upon assignment of this case the undersigned issued scheduling orders including an order that the parties meet prior to the date of the hearing on this matter to craft a stipulation of undisputed facts. Counsel for the parties did an excellent job crafting 47 paragraphs of stipulated facts. The stipulation was

Decision will not cite all of the legal authority reviewed and considered and which supports each and every conclusion. The Intervenors in this case, and the Respondent, submitted ample legal authority for their positions, and this Court will presume that all Appellate Judges reviewing this Decision will be familiar with the body of Election Law which defines and establishes broad principles of law, which for purposes of Petitioners' Appeal have not been challenged by any party, but which would normally be cited for completeness as a matter of course.

presented to the court during the on the record conference held the morning of the hearing. Stipulated Facts, Ct. Ex. 1. The hearing was held in the afternoon of November 17th, 2020. The stipulation of facts also included exhibits. During both the conference and the hearing, counsel were frequently questioned whether everyone agreed to something stated by an attorney or the Court. The record has not been transcribed and is not available to the Court at this time, and for that reason, there will be no references to a transcript. However, the Court is confident that the facts stated herein were agreed to by all parties on the record.

On November 7th, 2020 during the course of the canvass meeting of mail-in and absentee ballots, and in the presence of interested authorized representatives of the various candidates, the Respondent Board met to determine whether declarations on the envelopes of certain ballots were "sufficient" pursuant to the mandate of 25 P.S. § 3146.8(g)(3). 3,095 specific ballots had been identified and placed in different categories based on a possible deficiency of the ballot. The physical ballots were separated from the other ballots and secured along with all ballots of the same category. The Board made findings and decisions with respect to ten different categories of ballots, accepting some categories for canvassing and excluding others, as reflected in the Board's written decision made part of the record. The meeting and vote were conducted in the presence of authorized representatives of both Republican and Democratic candidates and parties. No one objected to or challenged the segregation of ballots into the designated categories. No one has appealed the

Board's decision to exclude 918 ballots for various reasons set forth in its written Decision. The only appeal has been from the Board's decision to not exclude certain ballots.

The parties' stipulation of facts identified the six categories which were challenged by Petitioners. During the hearing, counsel for Petitioner withdrew the challenge of category 6 and reduced the challenge of category 4. As a result, the following are the categories at issue for this decision:

- Category 1: 1196 ballots with no date or a partial date handwritten on the outer envelope;
- Category 2: 644 ballots with no handwritten name or address on the outer envelope;
- Category 3: 86 ballots with a partial written address on the outer envelope;
- Category 4: 182 ballots with a mismatched address on the outer envelope; and
- Category 5: 69 ballots with "unsealed" privacy envelopes.

The ballots in category 1 were deemed to be sufficient by the Respondent Board, and as a result they were canvassed. During oral argument the Court inquired whether it would be possible to segregate that category of ballots into two separate groups, one being ballots with no date and the other being ballots with a partial date. The Respondent Board has explained that the ballots were canvassed and cannot be retrieved as two separate groups. This Court believes

that the category as identified should have been segregated into two separate groups, however that was not done. All the ballots in this category are mingled together and a decision on those ballots must now accept this fact. Should this Court or an appellate court conclude that the absence of any date would invalidate a ballot but that a partial date would preserve the ballot the Court would be faced with the fact that invalidating the entire category would disenfranchise voters that had properly submitted their ballot. No record has been created to determine the exact number of ballots with no date versus ballots with a partial date. This Court concluded that to order a further review would be a futile exercise under the circumstances and now accepts the factual situation for what it is.

III. Discussion

Petitioners' Appeal as pled is limited to the argument that the Board's Decision to validate (and not reject) each of the ballots which have been categorized into five separate distinct groups was an "error of law." Petitioners have pled, in their challenge, that each category of ballots represents a violation of a specific provision of the Election Code citing §§ 3146.6(a) and 3150.16(a).

Although all provisions of the Election Code should be strictly enforced, the ultimate goal as confirmed by case law is to enfranchise voters, not to disenfranchise them. In re Wieskerger, 290 A.2d 108, 109 (Pa. 1972). The Court "cannot ignore the clear mandates of the Election Code." In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 Gen. Election, 843 A.2d 1223, 1231 (Pa. 2004)

[hereinafter "Appeal of Pierce"]. But, the Court must be flexible in favor of the right to vote. Wieskerger, 290 A.2d at 109; Appeal of Pierce, 843 A.2d at 1231.

In an attempt to balance those two overriding principles, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has ruled that certain provisions of the Election Code are mandatory, and some are directory. Specifically, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has identified and explained principles of law which control the argument set forth by the litigants herein, which provides guidance and clear direction to this Court. Ballots should not be disqualified based upon failure to follow directory provisions of the law. Shambach v. Bickhart, 845 A.2d 793, 803 (Pa. 2004) (holding that although the Election Code provides that an elector may cast a write-in vote for any person not printed on the ballot, a write-in vote for a candidate whose name in fact appears on the ballot is not invalid where there is no evidence of fraud and the voter's intent is clear); Wieskerger, 290 A.2d at 109 (holding that the elector's failure to mark the ballot with the statutorily enumerated ink color does not render the ballot invalid unless there is a clear showing that the ink was used for the purpose of making the ballot identifiable or otherwise indicating fraud). There is an important difference between mandatory and directory provisions of law: failure to strictly adhere to the requirements of a directory statute will not nullify the validity of the action involved, whereas mandatory provisions must be followed.

Applying the law to the facts of this case, this Court is mindful of the following facts which are set forth in the parties' stipulation of facts. Petitioners do not

allege that there is any evidence of fraud, misconduct, impropriety, or any undue influence committed with respect to the challenged ballots. There is no suggestion, evidence, or allegation that the electors who cast the ballots at issue were ineligible to vote in this election. There is no suggestion, evidence, or allegation that the challenged ballots were cast by someone other than the elector whose signature was on the outer envelope. No mail-in or absentee ballots were mailed out to electors before October 7th, 2020. The ballots which are the subject of this challenge were timely received by the Respondent Board before 8:00 PM on Election Day, November 3rd, 2020.

Petitioners raise challenges under Section 3146.6 and 3150.16 of the Election Code. These provisions are nearly identical, but one is applicable to absentee ballots while the other is applicable to mail-in ballots. Section 3146.6(a) provides for voting by absentee electors:

Except as provided in paragraphs (2) and (3), at any time after receiving an official absentee ballot, but on or before eight o'clock P.M. the day of the primary or election, the elector shall, in secret, proceed to mark the ballot only in black lead pencil, indelible pencil or blue, black or blue-black ink, in fountain pen or ball point pen, and then fold the ballot, enclose and securely seal the same in the envelope on which is printed, stamped or endorsed "Official Election Ballot." This envelope shall then be placed in the second one, on which is printed the form of declaration of the elector, and the address of the elector's county board of election and the local election district of the elector. The elector shall then fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on such envelope. Such envelope shall then be securely sealed and the elector shall send same by mail, postage prepaid, except where franked, or deliver it in person to said county board of election.

25 P.S. § 3146.6(a). Section 3150.16(a) provides for voting by mail-in electors:

At any time after receiving an official mail-in ballot, but on or before eight o'clock P.M. the day of the primary or election, the mail-in elector shall, in secret, proceed to mark the ballot only in black lead pencil, indelible pencil or blue, black or blue-black ink, in fountain pen or ball point pen, and then fold the ballot, enclose and securely seal the same in the envelope on which is printed, stamped or endorsed "Official Election Ballot." This envelope shall then be placed in the second one, on which is printed the form of declaration of the elector, and the address of the elector's county board of election and the local election district of the elector. The elector shall then fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on such envelope. Such envelope shall then be securely sealed and the elector shall send same by mail, postage prepaid, except where franked, or deliver it in person to said county board of election.

25 P.S. § 3150.16(a).

Pursuant to these provisions of the Election Code, Petitioners challenge ballots that were set aside for specific review in the following categories¹¹:

1. No date or partial date,
2. No printed name or address,
3. Partial address,

¹¹ There has been no challenge to the Board's Decision to set aside and not count ballots in the following categories:

- a. 110 ballots that failed to include a signature, which the Board ruled rendered the ballot "insufficient" and therefore it was not canvassed;
- b. 12 ballots where the elector's printed name did not match the name on the label located on the envelope;
- c. 2 ballots which came from the same household where the voters appeared to have inadvertently signed one another's declarations;
- d. 708 ballots which were not placed in a secrecy envelope thereby rendering them to be "naked"; and
- e. 21 ballots which contained secrecy envelopes with writing that revealed the elector's identity.

See Written Decision of Board.

4. Mismatched address, and
5. Unsealed privacy envelopes.

The relevant portion of the Election Code set forth above uses mandatory language which provides that electors "shall" take certain steps when submitting an absentee or mail-in ballot. Importantly, "the elector **shall** . . . fold the ballot, enclose and securely seal the same in the envelope on which is printed, stamped or endorsed 'Official Election Ballot.'" 25 P.S. §§ 3146.6(a), 3150.16(a) (emphasis added). And, "[t]he elector **shall** then fill out, *date* and *sign* the declaration printed on such envelope." *Id.* (emphasis added). Although not relevant to this decision, there is additional mandatory language in this provision of the Election Code: "[t]his envelope **shall** then be placed in the second one, on which is printed the form of declaration of the elector, and the address of the elector's county board of election and the local election district of the elector"; "[s]uch envelope **shall** then be *securely sealed*"; and "the elector **shall** send same by mail, postage prepaid, except where franked, or deliver it in person to said county board of election." *Id.* (emphasis added).

Mandatory language is used throughout the Election Code. "Pennsylvania's Election Code, no less than any other, is steeped with requirements phrased in the imperative, not only in terms of the technical requirements for ballot completion, but also in terms of the overall conduct of elections." *Bickhart*, 845 A.2d at 806 (Saylor, C.J., concurring). Because of the excessive use of imperative language in the Election Code, the Supreme Court has distinguished between provisions that

are directory and those that are mandatory. "It would be unreasonable to assume that the General Assembly thus intended that, unless each and every such requirement [using imperative language] is strictly adhered to by those conducting the elections, election results must be deemed void." Id. If the provisions are read as directory, although "they are intended to be obeyed, and will be enforced if raised before or during an election, [they] do not require invalidation of the election or disenfranchisement of electors where discovered in the election aftermath." Id. at n.2.

Respondent and Intervenors argued that even when imperative language such as "shall" is used in the statute, it is not necessarily mandatory language; it can, in fact, be used in directory provisions. Respondent and Intervenors argued that looking to the consequence of non-compliance with the provision determined whether the provision was mandatory or directory; the inquiry did not end with the plain language of the Election Code.

In support of this argument, Respondent and Intervenors relied on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's opinion in Boockvar, where the inquiry was to determine whether the Election Code allowed a board to void ballots that were not within a secrecy envelope. Pa. Democratic Party v. Boockvar, No. 133 MM 2020, 2020 Pa. LEXIS 4872, at *57 (Pa. 2020 Sept. 17, 2020). "In determining the propriety of naked ballots, we must ascertain the General Assembly's intention by examining the statutory text of the secrecy envelope provision to determine whether it is mandatory or directory, as that will govern the consequences for non-

compliance." 2020 Pa. LEXIS 4872, at *66. The Court ruled that "the difference between a mandatory and directory provision is the consequence for non-compliance: a failure to strictly adhere to the requirements of a directory statute will not nullify the validity of the action involved." Id. (quoting JPay, Inc. v. Dep't of Corrs. & Governor's Off. of Admin., 89 A.3d 756, 763 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2014)). The Court distinguished the statutory provision at issue from those involved in cases where imperative language was found to be directory. Specifically, it distinguished Bickhart and Wieskerger. Id. at *68-69. In both of those cases, the Court found that ballots with "minor irregularities" should only be stricken when there is a compelling reason to do so. In Bickhart, the Court counted a ballot where a candidate who was already named on the ballot was written in by the elector. Bickhart, 845 A.2d at 803. In Wieskerger, the Court counted a ballot that was completed in the wrong color ink. Wieskerger, 290 A.2d at 109. "Marking a ballot in voting is a matter not of precision engineering but of an unmistakable registration of the voter's will in substantial conformity to statutory requirement." Id. (quoting Reading Election Recount Case, 188 A.2d 254, 256 (Pa. 1963)).

In contrast, in Appeal of Pierce, where the provision at issue was the "in-person" delivery requirement, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court found this provision "unambiguously provided that 'the elector shall send [the absentee ballot] by mail, postage [prepaid], except where franked, or deliver it in person to [said county] board of election.'" Boockvar, 2020 Pa. LEXIS 4872, at *70. The Court "was unpersuaded by the argument that the language was directory and

declined the invitation to interpret 'shall' as anything less than mandatory." Id. "The word 'shall' carries an imperative or mandatory meaning." Appeal of Pierce, 843 A.2d at 1231. In Appeal of Pierce, the Supreme Court distinguished Wieskerger based on the fact that it was "decided before the enactment of the Statutory Construction Act, which dictates that legislative intent is to be considered only when a statute is ambiguous." Id. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court stated that to construe the provision at issue, which utilized the word "shall," as "merely directory would render its limitation meaningless and, ultimately, absurd." Id. at 1232. The Court stated that "precedent is clear: we cannot simply ignore substantive provisions of the Election Code." Id. at 1234. "[S]o-called technicalities of the Election Code are necessary for the preservation of secrecy and the sanctity of the ballot must therefore be observed." Id.

Being mindful of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's recent rulings, interpreting the current Election Code, this Court finds the following with respect to each category:

1. Category 1: 1196 Ballots With No Date or a Partial Date Handwritten on the Outer Envelope

As mentioned, when setting aside ballots because of deficiencies in the completion of the declaration, the Board combined those ballots which had a partial date with those that had no date into one category. This category commingles what this Court considers two separate categories: ballots with no dates and ballots with partial dates. There are an undefined number of ballots with

absolutely no date whatsoever and an undefined number of ballots that were dated in some fashion, but where the date was considered to be partial. This Court would, with little hesitation, accept the argument that a deficiency (i.e., a partial date) on an envelope would not invalidate that ballot. The totality of the circumstances confirms that the ballot was signed on a date that qualified the ballot because the parties stipulated in their stipulation of facts at ¶ 44 that "challenged ballots were completed and received between October 7th and November 3rd, 2020." Therefore, these ballots would meet the requirement that the elector "shall fill out, date and sign the declaration" as stated in Sections 3146.6 and 3150.16 of the Election Code. See 25 P.S. §§ 3146.6(a), 3150.16(a). Within this subcategory, the elector would have complied with the law's mandate that "[t]he elector **shall** then fill out, *date* and *sign* the declaration printed on such envelope." Id. (emphasis added).

With respect to a subcategory of ballots which were completely undated, this Court finds that the question before the Court is much more complicated. Respondent and Intervenors passionately argue that the mandate to "date" is directory only and the totality of the evidence proves that the ballots were signed on a date consistent with the law. This Court agrees with the conclusion that the totality of the evidence, stipulated to by the parties, proves that the ballots were signed on some date appropriate to the Election Law; however, the only specific guidance available to this Court, on this subject, is found in In re Nov. 3, 2020, Gen. Election, No. 149 MM 2020, 2020 Pa. LEXIS 5560, at *36 (Pa. Oct. 23, 2020), where

the Pennsylvania Supreme Court specifically ruled on the Board's duty to determine the sufficiency of the Declaration on the envelope. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has provided this Court, and all Board of Elections, with this mandate:

Both sections [3146.6(a) and 3150.16(a)] require that the elector "fill out, date and sign the declaration." Thus, in determining whether the declaration is "sufficient" for a mail-in or absentee ballot at canvassing, **the county board is required to ascertain whether the declaration on the return envelope has been filled out, dated, and signed.** This is the extent of the board's obligation in this regard. In assessing a declaration's sufficiency, there is nothing in this language which allows or compels a county board to compare signatures. Accordingly, we decline to read a signature comparison requirement into the plain and unambiguous language of the Election Code, as Intervenor urge us to do, inasmuch as the General Assembly has chosen not to include such a requirement at canvassing.

2020 Pa. LEXIS 5560, at *36 (emphasis added).

Intervenor and Respondent argued to this Court that the language of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court was dicta as it relates to the words "dated and signed". Ultimately, an Appellate Court may rule that the language was merely dicta; however, the undersigned feels constrained to follow the clear language of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Decision with respect to this issue. A studied review of election law has demonstrated to the undersigned that many sections of the Election Law which were ultimately concluded to be directory rather than mandatory despite the use of the word "shall", went through a gauntlet of judicial opinions with varying views up until the question was resolved by the Pennsylvania

Supreme Court. See Appeal of Pierce, 843 A.2d 1223 (Pa. 2003); Bickhart, 845 A.2d 793 (Pa. 2004).

In reflecting on this issue, the undersigned cannot help but see the irony in the fact that the absence of a signature invalidates the ballot. Respondent refused to Canvass ballots that had not been signed. However, if someone put an obviously false signature on the ballot, the ballot would have been most probably counted because the Court has also ruled that nothing in the language of the Statute compelled a County Board to compare the signature; whereas if someone put a date on the envelope which demonstrated that the vote was made at an improper time, ~~that~~ that fact would be readily apparent to the Board when Canvassing and it would result in a ballot being set aside. During oral argument, the Court pointed out ~~tha~~ that virtually all-important documents are dated when signed. If these two subcategories of ballots had not been co-mingled, and if it were possible to segregate those ballots which had no date at all, this Court would have reflected on the issue further, searched for additional legal authority, but most probably would have ruled that an undated ballot is not sufficient based on the existing law set by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's ruling in In re Nov. 3, 2020 Gen. Election. However, the ballots were co-mingled and therefore there is no practical way to discard those un-dated ballots without disenfranchising electors whose ballots (partially dated) this Court would conclude are valid.

The act of co-mingling those ballots was done in the presence of both Republican and Democratic representatives. All candidates had the right to

have a representative present when the Board issued its ruling. The representatives present were specifically named in the Stipulated Findings of Fact. Pursuant to this Court's Scheduling Order, those representatives received a copy of Petitioners' Petition and notice of the hearing. Only one of the named representatives participated in the hearing. The undersigned noted, on the record, that he was personally familiar with the lawyers who were acting as representatives and knew them to be bright, articulate people, not shy or reluctant to speak out. Those lawyer/representatives all knew how to contact the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas, and therefore, any or all of them could have insisted on subcategorizing this category of ballots before they were co-mingled.

This issue identified by the undersigned has effectively created a waiver issue for these ballots. This Court specifically finds with respect to these specific ballots that it would be unfair and improper to disenfranchise the undefined number of electors who issued a proper ballot, simply because their ballot was co-mingled with what the undersigned would have felt compelled under current law to deem "insufficient".

Upon review of this issue by an Appellate Court, this Court urges consideration to the issue of co-mingling and this Court's ruling that the issue has been waived. The issue of co-mingling was before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in Appeal of Pierce, and is noted at footnote 16. See Appeal of Pierce, 843 A.2d at 250, n.16

There, the Court declined to rule on the validity of a co-mingled ballot because the issue was not preserved.

2. Categories 2-4: 644 Ballots With No Handwritten Name or Address on the Outer Envelope, 86 Ballots With a Partial Written Address on the Outer Envelope, and 182 Ballots With a Mismatched Address on the Outer Envelope

The 644 ballots with no handwritten name or address on the outer envelope, the 86 ballots with a partial written address on the outer envelope, and the 182 ballots with a mismatched address on the outer envelope should be counted as these errors are ministerial, technical errors. Failure of the elector to complete this information is not an error of law. Although the provision in question requires an elector to "fill out" the declaration, there is no requirement that filling out the declaration needs to include handwriting the elector's name and address. Even following a strict construction of the Election Code language, as urged by Petitioners, these "errors" (failure to adequately complete information on the outer envelope) are not mandated by the statute. Rather, these errors are "minor irregularities," which should not invalidate ballots. As with the Supreme Court's decision in Bickhart and Wieskerger, the minor irregularity of a lack of a complete handwritten name or address is not necessary to prevent fraud, and there would be no ~~other~~ significant interest undermined by allowing these ballots to be counted.

3. Category 5: 69 Ballots With "Unsealed" Privacy Envelopes

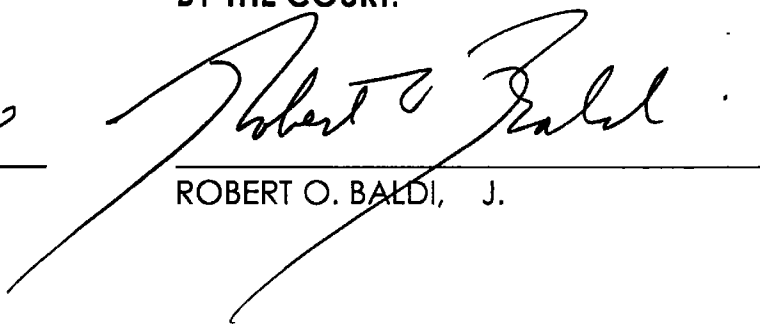
The ballots at issue in this category are not "naked ballots," which would be invalid pursuant to the Supreme Court's decision in Boockvar, 2020 Pa. LEXIS 4872, at *73. Rather, these ballots were enclosed within their respective privacy envelopes; however, those envelopes were not sealed at the time of canvassing. There is no factual evidence that supports a conclusion that the envelopes had not been sealed by the elector prior to that time. In the stipulation of facts at ¶ 46, the parties stipulated "[w]ith respect to Category 5 (69 ballots in "unsealed" privacy envelopes), Defendant could not determine whether the privacy envelopes were initially sealed by the elector but ~~later~~ became unsealed." Therefore, this Court finds there is no evidence that the electors failed to "securely seal [the ballot] in the [privacy] envelope," as required by the Election Code. The elector was provided the envelope by the government. If the glue on the envelope failed that would be the responsibility of the government. There is insufficient evidence to determine whether the specific language of the mandated law was violated. This Court finds it would be an injustice to disenfranchise these voters when it cannot be shown that the ballots in question were not "securely sealed" in the privacy envelope prior to the canvassing of those ballots, and for all of the reasons stated previously, there has been no suggestion or evidence that the absence of a sealed inner envelope in anyway jeopardized the privacy of the ballot.

IV. Conclusion

For the reasons set forth herein above, the objections to the ballots of Petitioner Donald J. Trump for President, Inc., et al. are all OVERRULED, the requests for relief made therein are DENIED and the Appeal is DISMISSED.

BY THE COURT:

11/19/20
DATE


ROBERT O. BALDI, J.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA
CIVIL DIVISION

IN RE: CANVASS OF ABSENTEE AND/OR :
MAIL-IN BALLOTS OF NOVEMBER 3, 2020 : No. 20-05786-35
GENERAL ELECTION :
ELECTION :
:
:
PETITION OF DONALD J. TRUMP FOR :
PRESIDENT, et al. :

ORDER

AND NOW, this 19th day of November, 2020, upon consideration of (1) the Petition for Review of Decision by the Bucks County Board of Elections filed on behalf of Petitioners Donald J. Trump for President, Inc., Republican National Committee, Heidelbaugh for Attorney General, Inc., and Garrity for PA; (2) the responses in opposition thereto filed by Respondent Bucks County Board of Elections, Intervenor Democratic National Committee, and Intervenor Pennsylvania House Democratic Campaign Committee and Bucks County Democratic Committee; and (3) the evidence presented including all stipulations and admissions by counsel as well as the arguments of counsel during the on the record prehearing conference and the hearing on November 17th, 2020, for the reasons set forth in the accompanying Memorandum, it is hereby **ORDERED** and **DECREED** that said Petition for Review is **DENIED**. The Bucks County Board of Elections is **ORDERED** consistent with the Memorandum to count the ballots which are the subject of the Petition:

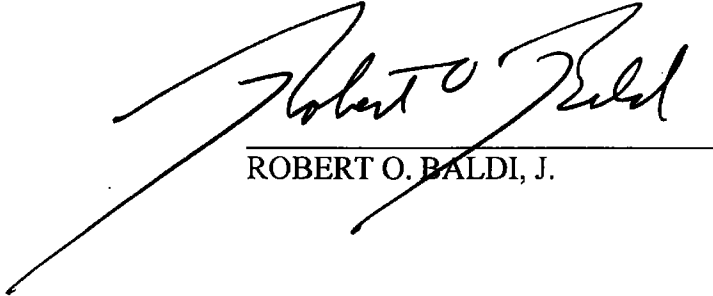
1. 1,196 ballots with no date or a partial date handwritten on the outer envelope;
2. 644 ballots with no handwritten name or address on the outer envelope;
3. 86 ballots with a partial written address on the outer envelope;

N.B. It is the responsibility of all parties to notify all interested parties of the content of this order/getting

Exhibit 1

4. 182 ballots with a mismatched address on the outer envelope; and
5. 69 ballots with "unsealed" privacy envelopes.

BY THE COURT:



Handwritten signature of Robert O. Baldi in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

ROBERT O. BALDI, J.

11/19/20

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

In Re: 2,349 Ballots in the
2020 General Election :
: No. 1162 C.D. 2020
: Submitted: November 19, 2020
Appeal of: Nicole Zicarelli :

BEFORE: HONORABLE P. KEVIN BROBSON, Judge
HONORABLE PATRICIA A. McCULLOUGH, Judge
HONORABLE MICHAEL H. WOJCIK, Judge

OPINION NOT REPORTED

MEMORANDUM OPINION
BY JUDGE BROBSON

FILED: November 19, 2020

Nicole Zicarelli, a Republican candidate for State Senator from the 45th Senatorial District in the General Election (Candidate), initiated a statutory appeal under the Pennsylvania Election Code¹ (Election Code) in the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County (Common Pleas Court) from a decision by the Allegheny County Board of Elections (Elections Board) to canvass and count 2,349 absentee or mail-in ballots for the November 3, 2020 General Election (General Election) notwithstanding the lack of a date of signature by the elector on the statutorily required elector declaration on the outside envelope of the ballots. On appeal, the Common Pleas Court rejected the Campaign Committee's arguments and affirmed the Elections Board's decision in a November 18, 2020 Order.²

¹ Act of June 3, 1937, P.L. 1333, *as amended*, 25 P.S. §§ 2600-3591.

² On application by Candidate, this Court issued an Order late on November 18, 2020, enjoining the Elections Board from canvassing and counting the disputed ballots and directed that the Elections Board segregate those ballots pending further order of the Court.

The Committee filed a timely appeal from the Common Pleas Court's order with this Court, contending that the disputed ballots are invalid and cannot be counted. The parties have submitted briefs in support of their respective arguments on the merits.

Given the exigency,³ we dispense with an extensive summary of the parties' respective positions on appeal. Generally, the Candidate alleges that the absentee and mail-in ballots that are the subject of this appeal are defective and, therefore, cannot be counted under the Election Code. The Elections Board and DNC Services Corp./Democratic National Committee (DNC)⁴ generally contend that we must interpret and apply the Election Code to enfranchise, rather than disenfranchise voters. This means, according to the Elections Board and the DNC, that what they term "minor irregularities" in elector declarations can, and in this case should, be overlooked in the absence of any evidence of fraud.

Each county board of election is required to provide the mail-in ballot elector with the following: (1) two envelopes—an inner secrecy envelope in which the executed ballot is placed and an outer mailing envelope in which the secrecy envelope (containing the executed ballot) is placed for mailing (or drop off); (2) a list of candidates, if authorized; and (3) "the uniform instructions in form and substance as prescribed by the Secretary of the Commonwealth and nothing else." Sections 1304 and 1304-D(c) of the Election Code, 25 P.S. §§ 3146.4, 3150.14(c). The outer mailing envelope must include an elector declaration and the name and

³ "The integrity of the election process requires immediate resolution of disputes that prevent certification." *In re 2003 Election for Jackson Twp. Supervisor*, 840 A.2d 1044, 1046 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2003) (Kelly, S.J.).

⁴ Though not a named party originally, the Common Pleas Court granted the DNC intervenor status as a respondent.

address of the proper county board of election. Sections 1304 and 1304-D(a) of the Election Code. The form of the declaration is left up to the Secretary of the Commonwealth (Secretary). It must, however, include “a statement of the elector’s qualifications, together with a statement that the elector has not already voted in the primary or election.” Sections 1304 and 1304-D(b) of the Election Code. The Secretary adopted a form declaration that includes the required statutory language and space for the elector to sign, date, and fill out the elector’s name and address.

In its recent decision in *In re November 3, 2020 General Election*, ___ A.3d ___ (Pa., No. 149 MM 2020, filed Oct. 23, 2020), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reviewed the requirements in the Election Code with respect to the elector declaration on mail-in and absentee ballots. To execute a mail-in or absentee ballot, the Election Code requires the elector to “fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on [the outside] envelope.” Sections 1306(a) and 1306-D(a), 25 P.S. §§ 3146.6(a), 3150.16(a). During the pre-canvass or canvass of mail-in and absentee ballots, the board of election “is required to determine if the ballot declaration is ‘sufficient.’” *In re: November 3, 2020 Gen. Election*, ___ A.3d at ___, slip op. at 25 (quoting Section 1308(g)(3) of the Election Code,⁵ 25 P.S. § 3146.8(g)(3)). With respect to determining the sufficiency of the declaration, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court explained the boards of election’s obligation: “[I]n determining whether the declaration is ‘sufficient’ for a mail-in or absentee ballot at canvassing, the county board *is required* to ascertain whether the declaration on the return envelope has been filled out, *dated*, and signed. This is the extent of the board’s obligation in this regard.” *Id.* (emphasis added).

⁵ Added by the Act of March 6, 1951, P.L. 3.

The concern that an elector might fail to “fill out” the declaration in full, let alone date and sign the declaration, in part prompted the Pennsylvania Democratic Party and Democratic elected official and candidates (Democratic Party) to initiate a suit in this Court’s original jurisdiction against the Secretary and every Pennsylvania county board of election earlier this year, seeking declaratory and injunctive relief. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, pursuant to Section 726 of the Judicial Code, 42 Pa. C.S. § 726, assumed jurisdiction over the case to address issues relating to the interpretation and implementation of Act 77 of 2019⁶—the statute that amended the Election Code to authorize mail-in voting (a/k/a no-excuse absentee voting).

Among the issues/concerns raised by the Democratic Party was that electors may submit their mail-in or absentee ballots with “minor facial defects resulting from their failure to comply with the statutory requirements for voting by mail.” *Pa. Democratic Party v. Boockvar*, 238 A.3d 345, 372 (Pa. 2020). The Democratic Party asked the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to require county boards of election to give those electors notice and an opportunity to cure the defective ballots. In advancing that argument, the Democratic Party relied on the same principles the Board relies on in this case—*i.e.*, liberal construction of the Election Code requirements and the favoring of enfranchising voters, not disenfranchising them. *Id.* at 372-73. The Secretary opposed the relief requested:

Unlike the other claims asserted herein, the Secretary opposes [p]etitioner’s request for relief in this regard. She counters that there is no statutory or constitutional basis for requiring the [b]oards [of election] to contact voters when faced with a defective ballot and afford them an opportunity to cure defects. The Secretary further notes that, while [p]etitioner relies on the Free and Equal Elections Clause [of the

⁶ Act of October 31, 2019, P.L. 552, No. 77 (Act 77).

Pennsylvania Constitution], that Clause cannot create statutory language that the General Assembly chose not to provide.

The Secretary submits that so long as a voter follows the requisite voting procedures, he or she “will have an equally effective power to select the representative of his or her choice.” Emphasizing that [p]etitioner presents no explanation as to how the [b]oards [of election] would notify voters or how the voters would correct the errors, the Secretary further claims that, while it may be good policy to implement a procedure that entails notice of defective ballots and an opportunity to cure them, *logistical policy decisions like the ones implicated herein are more properly addressed by the Legislature, not the courts.*

Pa. Democratic Party v. Boockvar, 238 A.3d at 373 (emphasis added) (citations omitted) (quoting *League of Women Voters v. Cmwlth.*, 178 A.3d 737, 809 (Pa. 2018)). Apparently persuaded by the Secretary’s arguments, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court rejected the request for a judicially mandated notice and opportunity to cure:

Upon review, we conclude that the [b]oards [of election] are not required to implement a “notice and opportunity to cure” procedure for mail-in and absentee ballots that voters have filled out incompletely or incorrectly. Put simply, as argued by the parties in opposition to the requested relief, [p]etitioner has cited no constitutional or statutory basis that would countenance imposing the procedure [p]etitioner seeks to require (*i.e.*, having the [b]oards [of election] contact those individuals whose ballots the [b]oards [of election] have reviewed and identified as including “minor” or “facial” defects—and for whom the [b]oards [of election] have contact information—and then afford those individuals the opportunity to cure defects until the [federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act⁷] deadline).

While the Pennsylvania Constitution mandates that elections be “free and equal,” it leaves the task of effectuating that mandate to the Legislature. As noted herein, although the Election Code provides the procedures for casting and counting a vote by mail, it does not provide for the “notice and opportunity to cure” procedure sought by [p]etitioner. *To the extent that a voter is at risk for having his or her ballot rejected due to minor errors made in contravention of those requirements, we agree that the decision to provide a “notice and*

⁷ 52 U.S.C. §§ 20301-20311.

opportunity to cure” procedure to alleviate that risk is one best suited for the Legislature. We express this agreement particularly in light of the open policy questions attendant to that decision, including what the precise contours of the procedure would be, how the concomitant burdens would be addressed, and how the procedure would impact the confidentiality and counting of ballots, all of which are best left to the legislative branch of Pennsylvania’s government. Thus, for the reasons stated, the [p]etitioner is not entitled to the relief it seeks in Count III of its petition.

Id. at 374 (emphasis added) (citation omitted).

We must presume that the Elections Board was aware of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s decision in *In re: November 3, 2020 General Election* and its earlier decision in *Pennsylvania Democratic Party* when the Elections Board began the canvass and pre-canvass process for mail-in and absentee ballots. The Elections Board chose, nonetheless, to ignore its obligations under the Election Code to determine the sufficiency of the mail-in and absentee ballots at issue, as recapitulated by the Supreme Court in *In re: November 3, 2020 General Election*, and apparently took the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s decision in *Pennsylvania Democratic Party* as both a ruling against a notice and opportunity to cure remedy for defective ballots and an invitation to, instead, simply *ignore* defects when canvassing and pre-canvassing. In so doing, the Elections Board even acted in conflict with September 28, 2020 guidance from the Secretary: “At the pre-canvass or canvass, as the case may be, the county board of election[] should . . . [s]et aside any ballots without a filled out, dated and signed declaration envelope.” Pennsylvania Dep’t of State, *Guidance Concerning Civilian Absentee and Mail-In Ballot Procedures*, 9/28/2020, at 8, available at <https://www.dos.pa.gov/VotingElections/OtherServicesEvents/Documents/DOS%20Guidance%20Civilian%20Absentee%20and%20Mail-In%20Ballot%20Procedure>

[s.pdf](#) (last visited Nov. 20, 2020).⁸ Where the Elections Board tacitly derived its authority to ignore its statutory obligation to determine the sufficiency of ballots and to violate the will of the General Assembly reflected in Act 77, approved by the Governor, and the guidance of the Secretary is a mystery.

The General Assembly's authority in this regard, however, is certain. Under the United States Constitution, the General Assembly determines the "Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for . . . Representatives," subject to any rules that Congress may establish.⁹ The General Election, during which the voters of Pennsylvania select their representatives to the United States House of Representatives, falls within the provision. Even in cases involving the right to vote, the rules of statutory construction apply. *See In re: November 3, 2020 Gen. Election*, ___ A.3d at ___, slip op. at 19-20; *Pa. Democratic Party*, 238 A.3d at 355-56. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has already determined that the above statutory language regarding the casting and pre-canvassing and canvassing of mail-in and absentee ballots is "plain," *In re: November 3, 2020 Gen. Election*, ___ A.3d at ___, slip op. at 24, and "unambiguous," *id.*, slip op. at 25, with respect to an elector's obligation to "fill out, date and sign" the declaration and the county board of election's obligation to determine the sufficiency of that declaration. The constitutionality of these provisions is not in question here. It is not the judiciary's role, let alone the role of the Elections Board, to relax or ignore

⁸ We note that the Pennsylvania Supreme Court cited to this supplemental guidance from the Secretary in its opinion in *In re: November 3, 2020 Gen. Election*, ___ A.3d at ___, slip op. at 4.

⁹ U.S. Const. art. I, § 4, cl. 1 ("Elections Clause"). The full text of the Elections Clause provides: "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of chusing Senators."

requirements that the General Assembly, with the Governor's approval, chose to include in the Election Code.

In this regard, while we recognize the well-settled principle of statutory construction that the Election Code should be liberally construed in favor of voter enfranchisement, not disenfranchisement, like all principles of statutory construction this rule is only implicated where there is ambiguity in the Election Code. *See In re: Canvassing Observation*, ___ A.3d ___, (Pa., No. 30 EAP 2020, filed Nov. 13, 2020), slip op. at 15-16; *Pa. Democratic Party*, 238 A.3d at 356. In *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election*, 843 A.2d 1223 (Pa. 2004), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reversed a decision by this Court that would have allowed the Elections Board to count absentee ballots that were hand-delivered by a third person on behalf of electors *who were not disabled*. Then, and now, the Election Code expressly prohibits this practice. This Court's reason for disregarding the mandatory language of the Election Code that authorized only "in person" delivery as an alternative to mail was our view "that it was more important to protect the interest of the voters by not disenfranchising them than to adhere to the strict language of the statute under these circumstances." *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election*, 839 A.2d 451, 460 (Pa. Cmwlth.) (en banc), *rev'd*, 843 A.2d 1223 (Pa. 2004).

In reversing this Court, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court looked to the rules of statutory construction. *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election*, 843 A.2d at 1230. Critically for purposes of this matter, in terms of the Election Code, the Supreme Court held: "[A]ll things being equal, the law will be construed liberally in favor of the right to vote *but at the same time, we cannot ignore the clear mandates of the Election Code.*" *Id.* at 1231 (emphasis added).

The relevant language in Section 1306(a) of the Election Code provided at the time what it provides today: “[T]he elector *shall* send [the absentee ballot] by mail, postage prepaid, except where franked, or deliver it in person to said county board of election.” (Emphasis added.) The Supreme Court held that the General Assembly’s use of the word “shall” had a clear “imperative or mandatory meaning.” *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election*, 843 A.2d at 1231. While the appellees argued that the word should be construed liberally (as directory and not mandatory) in favor of the right to vote, the Supreme Court disagreed:

In Section [1306(a)], there is nothing to suggest that an absentee voter has a choice between whether he mails in his ballot or delivers his ballot in person, or has a third-party deliver it for him. To construe Section [1306(a)] as merely directory would render its limitation meaningless and, ultimately, absurd.

Id. at 1232.¹⁰ Alternatively, even if the statutory language were ambiguous, the Court held that “there is an obvious and salutary purpose—grounded in hard experience—behind the limitation upon the delivery of absentee ballots.” *Id.* The court explained:

The provision at issue limits the number of third persons who unnecessarily come in contact with the ballot and thus provides some safeguard that the ballot was filled out by the actual voter, and not by a perpetrator of fraud, and that once the ballot has been marked by the actual voter in secret, no other person has the opportunity to tamper

¹⁰ The dissent chooses to rely on *Appeal of James*, 105 A.2d 64 (Pa. 1954), a case that did not involve mail-in or absentee ballots, but whether actual votes cast for one candidate in particular on election day should count where the intent of the electors to vote for that particular candidate was clearly manifested, albeit imperfectly, on the actual ballot. *Appeal of James* does not stand for the proposition that courts can and should disregard the clear and unambiguous terms of the Election Code, as the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s more recent pronouncements cited above establish. This case is about whether electors followed the law in submitting their ballots. Accordingly, *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election* is much more on point than *Appeal of James*.

with it, or even to destroy it. The provision, thus, is consistent with the spirit and intent of our election law, which requires that a voter cast his ballot alone, and that it remain secret and inviolate.

Id. (citation omitted). The Supreme Court concluded:

Our precedent is clear: we cannot simply ignore substantive provisions of the Election Code. . . . [S]o-called technicalities of the Election Code are necessary for the preservation of secrecy and the sanctity of the ballot and must therefore be observed—particularly where, as here, they are designed to reduce fraud.

Id. at 1234.

Here, we agree with, and are bound by, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's ruling in *In re: November 3, 2020 General Election* that Sections 1306(a) (absentee ballots), 1306-D(a) (mail-in ballots), and 1308(g)(3) (pre-canvass and canvass) of the Election Code, are plain and unambiguous. The General Assembly's use of the word "shall" in these provisions has a clear imperative and mandatory meaning. *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election*, 843 A.2d at 1231. The elector "**shall** . . . fill out, date and sign the declaration." The board of election "**shall** examine the declaration on the envelope of each ballot" and be "satisfied that the declaration is sufficient." A sufficient declaration is one where the elector filled out, dated, and signed the declaration. *In re: November 3, 2020 Gen. Election*, ___ A.3d at ___, slip op. at 25. To remove the date requirement would constitute a judicial rewrite of the statute, which, as the Pennsylvania Supreme Court recently held, "would be improper." *In re: Canvassing Observation*, ___ A.3d at ___, slip. op. at 17.¹¹

¹¹ See also *In re Silcox*, 674 A.2d 224, 225 (Pa. 1996) (holding that signatures on nomination petition without date must be stricken under clear and unambiguous language of statute, reasoning that "until the legislature chooses to amend [the statutory requirement for a date], we are constrained to find that the elector shall sign the petition as well as add . . . date of signing").

As noted above, the Election Code requires the county boards of election to determine whether absentee and mail-in ballots are satisfactory. Under the law, a satisfactory ballot is one where the elector has filled out, signed, and dated the statutorily-required declaration. This was the policy choice of the General Assembly and the Governor in approving Act 77, and it is not the role of this Court or the Elections Board to second guess those policy choices. It is a myth that all ballots must be counted in the absence of proof of fraud. Ballots, under the law, may be set aside for “fraud *or* error.” See Section 1407(b) of the Election Code, 25 P.S. § 3157 (emphasis added). While there may not be an allegation of fraud in this matter, there was clear error *at two levels*. First, the electors erred in failing to date their declarations, as required by the Election Code.¹² Second, the Elections Board erred when it failed to execute its duty during the canvass and pre-canvass process to determine the sufficiency of the declarations and set deficient ballots aside. Accordingly, the Common Pleas Court erred as a matter of law by failing to reverse the Elections Board’s determinations with respect to counting these defective mail-in and absentee ballots.

Even if we were to conclude that one of the relevant provisions of the Election Code suffered from some ambiguity that required us to resort to statutory construction to discern the General Assembly’s intent, our result would be the same.

¹² This is not a situation involving an ambiguity or question as to what an elector must do to cast a ballot and, seeking assistance, a confused elector relies on advice of a local election official. As noted above, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has already held that there is no ambiguity in this scheme as far as what the Election Code requires of the elector and the boards of election in determining whether a mail-in or absentee ballot is satisfactory. Moreover, there is simply no evidence that the electors who signed their declarations in this case failed to date the declaration in reliance on advice from a public official. See *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 Gen. Election*, 843 A.2d at 1234 n.14 (rejecting reliance argument where no evidence of reliance and where alleged advice is in clear contravention of law).

As was the case in *In re Canvass of Absentee Ballots of Nov. 4, 2003 General Election*, there is an obvious and salutary purpose behind the requirement that a voter date the declaration. The date provides a measure of security, establishing the date on which the elector actually executed the ballot in full, ensuring their desire to cast it in lieu of appearing in person at a polling place. The presence of the date also establishes a point in time against which to measure the elector's eligibility to cast the ballot, as reflected in the body of the declaration itself.¹³

While we realize that our decision in this case means that some votes will not be counted, the decision is grounded in law. It ensures that the votes will not be counted because the votes are invalid as a matter of law. Such adherence to the law ensures equal elections throughout the Commonwealth, on terms set by the General Assembly. The danger to our democracy is not that electors who failed to follow the law in casting their ballots will have their ballots set aside due to their own error; rather, the real danger is leaving it to each county board of election to decide what laws must be followed (mandatory) and what laws are optional (directory), providing a patchwork of unwritten and arbitrary rules that will have some defective ballots counted and others discarded, depending on the county in which a voter resides. Such a patchwork system does not guarantee voters an "equal" election,¹⁴

¹³ In this regard, it does not matter whether the ballots at issue in this case were, setting aside these defects, otherwise valid. Our Election Code does not contemplate a process that bogs down county boards of election or the many election day volunteers to track down voters who committed errors of law in casting their ballots in order to verify the information that the elector, through his or her own negligence, failed to provide on the elector's mail-in or absentee ballot. *See Pa. Democratic Party*, 238 A.3d at 373-34. Decisions as to whether these defective ballots must be set aside are to be made at the canvass or pre-canvass based on objective criteria established by the General Assembly and what is before the elections board—that being the ballot itself. *See id.* at 388-89 (Wecht, J., concurring).

¹⁴ "Elections shall be free and equal." Pa. Const. art. I, § 5.

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

In Re: 2,349 Ballots in the
2020 General Election

:
: No. 1162 C.D. 2020

Appeal of: Nicole Zicarelli

:
:

ORDER

AND NOW, this 19th day of November, 2020, the November 18, 2020 Order of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny is REVERSED, and this matter is REMANDED to the court of common pleas for further proceedings in accordance with the accompanying opinion.


P. KEVIN BROBSON, Judge

Certified from the Record

NOV 19 2020

And Order Exit

Exhibit 2

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

In Re: 2,349 Ballots in the :
2020 General Election :
: No. 1162 C.D. 2020
Appeal of: Nicole Zicarelli :

BEFORE: HONORABLE P. KEVIN BROBSON, Judge
HONORABLE PATRICIA A. McCULLOUGH, Judge
HONORABLE MICHAEL H. WOJCIK, Judge

DISSENTING OPINION
BY JUDGE WOJCIK

FILED: November 19, 2020

I respectfully dissent from the majority's decision to reverse the order of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County (trial court) in this matter.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has explained:

'The power to throw out a ballot for minor irregularities, like the power to throw out the entire poll of an election district for irregularities, must be exercised very sparingly and with the idea in mind that either an individual voter or a group of voters are not to be disfranchised at an election except for compelling reasons. * * * 'The purpose in holding elections is to register the actual expression of the electorate's will' and that 'computing judges' should endeavor 'to see what was the true result.' There should be the same reluctance to throw out a single ballot as there is to throw out an entire district poll, for sometimes an election hinges on one vote.'

In resolving election controversies it would not be amiss to consider the following criteria:

1. Was any specific provision of the Election Code violated?

2. Was any fraud involved?
3. Was the will of the voter subverted?
4. Is the will of the voter in doubt?
5. Did the loser suffer an unfair disadvantage?
6. Did the winner gain an unfair disadvantage?

Appeal of James, 105 A.2d 64, 67 (Pa. 1954) (citation omitted). It is undisputed that only the first of the foregoing six criteria is at issue with respect to the contested ballots herein.

Regarding the submission of a vote by absentee ballot, Section 1306(a) of the Pennsylvania Election Code¹ provides, in relevant part:

[A]t any time after receiving an official absentee ballot, but on or before eight o'clock P.M. the day of the primary or election, the elector shall, in secret, proceed to mark the ballot only in black lead pencil, indelible pencil or blue, black or blue-black ink, in fountain pen or ball point pen, and then fold the ballot, enclose and securely seal the same in the envelope on which is printed, stamped or endorsed "Official Election Ballot." This envelope shall then be placed in the second one, on which is printed the form of declaration of the elector, and the address of the elector's county board of election and the local election district of the elector. The elector shall then fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on such envelope. Such envelope shall then be securely sealed and the elector shall send same by mail, postage prepaid, except where franked, or deliver it in person to said county board of election.

Likewise, with respect to voting by mail-in ballot, Section 1306-D(a) of the Pennsylvania Election Code² states:

¹ Act of June 3, 1937, P.L. 1333, added by the Act of March 6, 1951, P.L. 3, as amended, 25 P.S. §3146.6(a).

At any time after receiving an official mail-in ballot, but on or before eight o'clock P.M. the day of the primary or election, the mail-in elector shall, in secret, proceed to mark the ballot only in black lead pencil, indelible pencil or blue, black or blue-black ink, in fountain pen or ball point pen, and then fold the ballot, enclose and securely seal the same in the envelope on which is printed, stamped or endorsed "Official Election Ballot." This envelope shall then be placed in the second one, on which is printed the form of declaration of the elector, and the address of the elector's county board of election and the local election district of the elector. The elector shall then fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on such envelope. Such envelope shall then be securely sealed and the elector shall send same by mail, postage prepaid, except where franked, or deliver it in person to said county board of election.

In light of the foregoing statutory requirements, the majority seeks to disenfranchise 2,349 registered voters who timely returned their absentee or mail-in ballots to the Allegheny County Board of Elections (Board), which ballots were sealed in secrecy envelopes and inserted in sealed outer envelopes containing a declaration that the voters signed, but did not date, and which ballots the Board received by 8:00 p.m. on the date of the General Election, November 3, 2020. Unlike the majority, I do not believe that *Pennsylvania Democratic Party v. Boockvar*, 238 A.3d 345 (Pa. 2020), compels such a massive disenfranchisement as that case addressed a voter's ability to cure a "minor" defect on a mail-in or absentee ballot declaration page that consisted of a voter failing to "fill out, date and sign the declaration." In contrast, this case involves neither a voter's ability to cure a defective declaration page nor an unsigned declaration page. Moreover, as

(continued...)

² Added by the Act of October 31, 2019, P.L. 552, 25 P.S. §3150.16a.

noted above, this case does not involve any claim that any of the ballots in question were in any way fraudulent.

There is no dispute that the voters who cast the questioned 2,349 ballots were qualified, registered electors. Moreover, there is no allegation that any of the 2,349 voters in question had voted more than once. Importantly, there is no allegation that the subject 2,349 ballots were not received by the Board prior to the deadline for receipt on General Election Day. The only sin that would lead these votes to be discarded is that the qualified, registered voters failed to enter a date on the declaration portion of the ballot's outer envelope. I would agree that an entirely blank declaration properly would be discarded, as this is the situation contemplated by *Boockvar*. I would suppose that a declaration that the voter did not sign likewise would be discarded, as there would be no confirmation that the ballot is genuinely that of the registered elector. Both of these results would ameliorate purported voter fraud, which is not at issue here.

What then is the protection afforded by the insertion of a date in the declaration? I would posit that it is to ensure that the ballot was timely cast, that is, before the 8:00 p.m. deadline on General Election Day. This interest is protected in this case by the Board's procedures, *i.e.*, the ballots were processed in the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors and time stamped when received by the Board. Thus, I would hold that this process ensures that the ballots were timely cast.

The majority posits that the voter's entry of the date onto the declaration is material in that it measures a point in time to establish a voter's eligibility to cast a vote. This is simply incorrect, as the date on which a voter fills in a mail-in or absentee ballot is not the critical date, it is receipt on or before

General Election Day that is determinative. If a voter fills in a mail-in or absentee ballot, including the complete declaration, and dies prior to General Election Day, the vote is not valid regardless of when it was executed.³

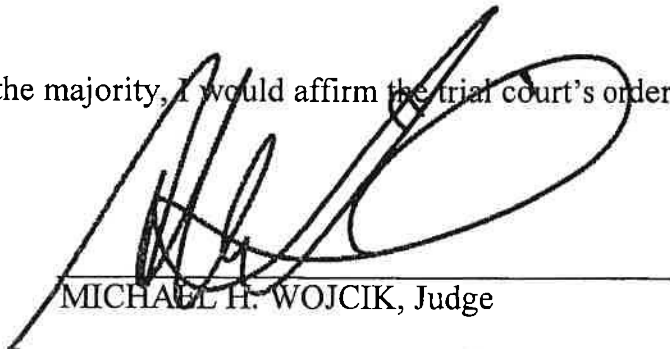
I view the requirement of a voter-inserted date on the declaration as similar to the issue of the color of ink that is used to fill in the ballot. As outlined above, Sections 1306(a) and 1306-D(a) of the Pennsylvania Election Code plainly state the voter “*shall*, in secret, proceed to mark the ballot only in black lead pencil, indelible pencil or blue, black or blue-black ink, in fountain pen or ball point pen.” 25 P.S. §§3146.6(a), 3150.16(a) (emphasis added). Our Supreme Court approved the marking of absentee ballots with green or red pen to be appropriate despite the General Assembly’s use of the word “shall” when describing the method of marking the ballots. *See In re Luzerne County Return Board*, 290 A.2d 108, 109 (Pa. 1972). There, our Supreme Court construed the Election Code liberally so as to not disenfranchise Pennsylvania voters over a technicality.⁴ In light of the foregoing criteria, I would do so here as well, and I

³ In this regard, I strongly disagree with the majority’s reliance on case law interpreting the inapposite provisions of the Pennsylvania Election Code requiring the inclusion of the date of signature on nomination petitions as that requirement implicates a distinct consideration relating to the timeliness of the circulation of the petitions. As indicated, the timeliness of the ballots cast herein is not at issue.

⁴ Similarly, I would revisit the so-called “naked ballot” issue where counties have been instructed to disqualify mail-in and absentee ballots that were returned without first being sealed in the “secrecy envelope.” I believe that the “secrecy envelope” is an anachronism that should have been abandoned when the Pennsylvania Election Code was recently amended. Under the prior version, absentee ballots were delivered to the corresponding polling places and opened there after the polls closed on General Election Day. Typically, there were a mere handful of absentee ballots at each poll. Without the “secrecy envelope,” there was a high probability that the poll worker would know the voters whose absentee ballots were opened there, which would impair those voters’ right to cast a secret ballot. As a result of the recent amendments to the Pennsylvania Election Code, mail-in and absentee ballots are retained at a centralized location **(Footnote continued on next page...)**

would not blithely disenfranchise those 2,349 voters who merely neglected to enter a date on the declaration of an otherwise properly executed and timely-submitted ballot.

Accordingly, unlike the majority, I would affirm the trial court's order in this case.



MICHAEL H. WOJCIK, Judge

(continued...)

and opened *en masse* beginning on General Election Day. Under the current regime, in cases of "naked ballots," I would favor a voter's right to cast a vote over the right to cast a secret ballot, because I believe that it is extremely unlikely that the election official who opens the envelope would know the voter whose ballot is being processed.

MHW - 6

Exhibit 2

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November 23, 2020



CAPTION

In Re: 2,349 Ballots in the
2020 General Election

Appeal of: Nicole Zicarelli

CASE INFORMATION

Initiating Document:	Notice of Appeal		
Case Status:	Closed		
Case Processing Status:	November 20, 2020	Completed	
Journal Number:	SE-3-2020		
Case Category:	Election	Case Type(s):	Election

CONSOLIDATED CASES

RELATED CASES

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FEE INFORMATION

Fee Dt	Fee Name	Fee Amt	Receipt Dt	Receipt No	Receipt Amt
11/18/2020	Notice of Appeal	90.25			0.00

AGENCY/TRIAL COURT INFORMATION

Order Appealed From: November 18, 2020 Notice of Appeal Filed: November 18, 2020
 Order Type: Order Dated
 Documents Received: November 18, 2020

Court Below: Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas
 County: Allegheny Division: Allegheny County Civil Division
 Judge: James, Joseph M. OTN:
 Docket Number: GD-20-011654 Judicial District: 05

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ORIGINAL RECORD CONTENT

Original Record Item	Filed Date	Content Description
Trial Court Record	November 19, 2020	
Testimony	November 19, 2020	
Trial Court Opinion	November 19, 2020	

Date of Remand of Record:

BRIEFING SCHEDULE

Appellant	Appellee
Zicarelli, Nicole Brief	Allegheny County Board of Elections Brief
Due: December 29, 2020	Filed: November 19, 2020
	Due: Filed: November 19, 2020
	Brewster, James Brief
	Due: Filed: November 19, 2020
	Pennsylvania Democratic Party Brief
	Due: Filed: November 19, 2020

DOCKET ENTRY

Filed Date	Docket Entry / Filer	Representing	Participant Type	Exit Date
November 18, 2020	Notice of Appeal Filed Zicarelli, Nicole		Appellant	
November 18, 2020	Filed - Other Zicarelli, Nicole		Appellant	
	Document Name: 103 WM 2020-Application for Extraordinary Relief			
November 18, 2020	Application for Relief Haverstick, Matthew Hermann	Zicarelli, Nicole	Appellant	
	Document Name: Emergency Application for Writ of Prohibition			
November 18, 2020	Filed - Other Haverstick, Matthew Hermann	Zicarelli, Nicole	Appellant	
	Document Name: Proposed Order - Emergency Application for Writ of Prohibition			

Commonwealth Docket Sheet

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November 23, 2020



DOCKET ENTRY

Filed Date	Docket Entry / Filer	Representing	Participant Type	Exit Date
November 18, 2020	Order Granting Application for Emergency Relief Per Curiam			11/18/2020
	Document Name: NOW, November 18, 2020, upon consideration of Appellant Nichole Ziccarelli's Emergency Application			
	Comment: for Writ of Prohibition, which this Court treats as an Application for Injunction Pending Appeal, it is hereby ORDERED that the Emergency Application is GRANTED as follows:			
	1. The Allegheny County Board of Elections shall segregate the mail in ballots at issue in this appeal.			
	2. The Allegheny County Board of Elections is enjoined from canvassing or counting the mail-in ballots at issue in this appeal until further order of the Court.			
	The Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County shall transmit the record in this action, to include the transcript, if any, of the proceeding held on November 17, 2020, by no later than 12:00 p.m. on November 19, 2020.			
	The parties shall file and serve simultaneous briefs on the merits of this appeal (4 copies) on or before 12:00 p.m. on November 19, 2020, in the Prothonotary's Office in Harrisburg. Briefs and other filings should be filed via PACFile (the Pennsylvania appellate court electronic filing system) OR by email to CommCourtFiling@pacourts.us. Briefs may also be filed in person in the Prothonotary's Office with advance notice by appointment by calling 717-255-1650. Appellant is excused from filing a Reproduced Record.			
	In addition to transmitting and mailing copies of this order to counsel of record and any pro se party, the Prothonotary is directed to transmit and mail a copy to the Allegheny County Department of Court Records and to Judge Joseph M. James of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County.			
November 19, 2020	Trial Court Record Received Allegheny County Civil Division			
November 19, 2020	Transcripts of Testimony Allegheny County Civil Division			
November 19, 2020	Trial Court Opinion Received Allegheny County Civil Division			
November 19, 2020	Appellant's Brief Filed Ziccarelli, Nicole		Appellant	
November 19, 2020	Entry of Appearance Scott, Virginia Spencer	Allegheny County Board of Elections	Appellee	
	Document Name: Atty. Virginia Scott for Allegheny County Board of Elections			
November 19, 2020	Entry of Appearance Liebenguth, Frances Marie	Allegheny County Board of Elections	Appellee	
	Document Name: Frances Marie Liebenguth on behalf of Allegheny County Board of Elections			
November 19, 2020	Order Filed Per Curiam			11/19/2020
	Document Name: AND NOW, this 19th day of November, 2020, this matter shall be submitted to a panel of judges			
	Comment: on the briefs, without oral argument, in accordance with Commonwealth Court Internal Operating Procedures Sections 112(b) and 258, 210 Pa. Code Section 69.112(b) and 258.			

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DOCKET ENTRY

Filed Date	Docket Entry / Filer	Representing	Participant Type	Exit Date
November 19, 2020	Appellee's Brief Filed Pennsylvania Democratic Party Brewster, James		Appellee Appellee	
November 19, 2020	Entry of Appearance Zimmer, Samantha G. Document Name: Samantha G. Zimmer, Esq. on behalf of appellant Nicole Zicarelli.	Zicarelli, Nicole	Appellant	
November 19, 2020	Appellee's Brief Filed Allegheny County Board of Elections		Appellee	
November 19, 2020	Reversed/Remanded Brobson, P. Kevin Document Name: Memorandum Opinion (20pgs) Comment: the November 18, 2020 Order of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny is REVERSED, and this matter is REMANDED to the court of common pleas for further proceedings in accordance with the accompanying opinion.			11/19/2020
November 20, 2020	Notice of Discontinuance Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Document Name: 103 WM 2020			
November 20, 2020	Petition for Allowance of Appeal to PA Supreme Court Filed Allegheny County Board of Elections Document Name: 337 WAL 2020		Appellee	
November 20, 2020	Order Filed Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Document Name: 337 WAL 20-PAA of Emergency Appeal is Granted in Part. order of the Comm Court of 11/19/20 Comment: is STAYED pending resolution of this appeal.			11/20/2020
November 20, 2020	Notice Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Document Name: 29 WAP 2020-Allocatur Granted.			

SESSION INFORMATION

Journal Number: SE-3-2020
 Consideration Type: Submitted on Briefs
 Listed/Submitted Date: November 19, 2020

Panel Composition:

The Honorable P. Kevin Brobson	Judge
The Honorable Patricia A. McCullough	Judge
The Honorable Michael H. Wojcik	Judge

DISPOSITION INFORMATION

Final Disposition: Yes

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DISPOSITION INFORMATION

Related Journal No:		Judgment Date:	
Category:	Decided	Disposition Author:	Brobson, P. Kevin
Disposition:	Reversed/Remanded	Disposition Date:	November 19, 2020
Disposition Comment:	the November 18, 2020 Order of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny is REVERSED, and this matter is REMANDED to the court of common pleas for further proceedings in accordance with the accompanying opinion.		
Dispositional Filing:	Memorandum Opinion	Filing Author:	Brobson, P. Kevin
Filed Date:	11/19/2020 12:00:00AM		
Dispositional Filing:	Dissenting Opinion	Filing Author:	Wojcik, Michael H.
Filed Date:	11/19/2020 12:00:00AM		