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Jennifer Bullock testimony / Independent Pennsylvanians President's Commission on Elections September 4, 2013

Good afternoon members of this commission. Welcome to our nation's first capital and the city of brotherly love.

I am Jennifer Bullock, founder and director of Independent Pennsylvanians, a statewide activist group committed to strengthening the power and voice of independents. We are the state affiliate of the largest national activist hub for independents, Independentvoting.org.

Independents make up over 13%* of the electorate in PA and represent 40%* of the electorate nationally.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak directly to you about issues of election and voting access that are very important to me and I believe important to the very health of our democracy.

A colleague of mine who is an environmental activist came to me a few months ago making a heartfelt request for me to vote for a particular candidate in the primary who has a good record on the environment. I like the candidate, and consider myself an environmentalist, but unfortunately had to decline his request. This is because - along with the over one million PA voters not registered in the two major parties - I am barred in PA from voting in primaries, which serves as the important first round of elections.

PA is one of 17 states whose primaries are closed. This is fundamentally undemocratic. And to add salt to this wound on our democracy - I am barred from a voting process that I help to pay for as a taxpayer.

This and many examples we can share regarding the hyper-partisan control over redistricting, poll management, and ballot access, to name a few is what we ordinary citizens want and need to change. "Power to The People vs. The Parties" is not just a slogan but an important dialogue that needs to be addressed with seriousness and rigor. This includes a truly non-partisan view of our voting process that - with all due respect - goes beyond (albeit also important) issues such as accurate vote counting and user-friendly-ness of polling/voting mechanisms, but goes to the heart of free and fair elections.

To quote MLK on the anniversary of the famous March on Washington, fighting to eliminate social injustices, poverty, and voting rights for all: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
~Martin Luther King, Jr.

On behalf of the over 1 million independents in PA and 40%* nationally, I invite the Commission to more fully explore what it means that every voter counts, rather than just making sure that every vote is counted.

** Sources: Gallop Poll / PA State Dept.*