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Employers Urged to Adopt Time-Off for Democracy Policies on Election Day

Philadelphia, PA - WomenVote PA held a press conference today at 11:00 am in the Mayor's Reception Room in City Hall. The following statement was presented by Barbara Burgos DiTullio, Program Manager for WomenVote PA.

"WomenVote PA is a network of over 60 community groups, agencies, nonprofit organizations, and individuals working together to improve the status of women in Pennsylvania. We are an initiative of the Women's Law Project.

"We use both voter registration and education about critical issues facing women and their families, to explain the importance of civic engagement. We connect issues to the importance of voting.

"There is no doubt that this has been an exciting and historic election year. Although Presidential Elections usually have a better voter turnout than mid-term elections, this year has also produced record numbers of new voter registrations.

"During the last Presidential Election in 2004, Pennsylvania had 8.3 million people registered to vote, representing about 90% of the eligible voting population. However, when it came time to vote, only 68% of those who were registered actually voted.

"As a result, Pennsylvania ranked 27th out of 50 states in terms of voter turnout.

We can do better, but to do so, we need to make voting more accessible.

Of the 26 states that did a better job turning out voters, 10 of them had laws allowing either mail-in ballots or same day voter registration.ⁱ

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“We could talk about changing the laws as other states have, but that won’t help increase voter turnout in this election.

“What we can do, right now, is to make voting more accessible by asking employers to adopt Time-Off for Democracy policies in the workplace.

“With an anticipated record voter turnout in Pennsylvania, WomenVote PA and our coalition partners are asking employers to adopt Time-Off for Democracy policies which would allow employees to take up to two hours off to vote on Election Day.

“There is a sample of the Time-Off for Democracy Policy in the press packet which we are asking employers to consider incorporating into their personnel policies.

“By adopting Time-Off for Democracy policies, employers will be helping employees, especially those with family obligations, to get to the polls to vote. For many individuals juggling work and family can be difficult, making it all too easy to believe that your one vote doesn’t matter – but it does.

“Making voting more accessible is a key component to a healthy democracy,” concluded DiTullio.

Other speakers included one of the largest employers in Philadelphia, Drexel University, who was represented by Adele Barbato, Senior Vice President of Human Resources; Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, Michael Pratt; Zach Stalberg of the Committee of Seventy; and Mary Flannery was present representing the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. Businesses and organizations who have adopted or are planning on adopting some form of Time-Off for Democracy were invited to sign an enlarged pledge stating that they support the adoption of flexible work schedules on Election Day to enable employees to exercise their right to vote.

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ⁱ 2004 Voting-Age & Voting Eligible Population Estimates and Voter Turnout, Dept. of Public & International Affairs, George Mason University (http://elections.gmu.edu/Voter_Turnout_2004.htm); and reference for state voting methods based on U.S. Census (http://media.hoover.org/documents/fact4552956_fig2.pdf).