

PA DEPARTMENT OF STATE BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Thursday, March 5, 2026



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Department of State (DOS) Secretary Al Schmidt and senior DOS staff testified before the House Appropriations Committee today. House Republicans focused their questions on election integrity, the financial implications of special elections, automatic voter registration, and professional licensing.

Key Takeaways:

- The Governor is proposing a General Fund spending total of \$44.4 million for Fiscal Year 2026-27, an overall increase of \$1.3 million, or 2.9%, over the current fiscal year.
- Election Integrity should be a bipartisan issue. House Republicans asked several questions to Secretary Schmidt on how DOS is taking election integrity seriously.
 - Members learned that the SURE system, originally scheduled for completion by 2024, remains behind schedule and will not be implemented in 2026; no target date was provided.
 - Secretary Schmidt indicated he believes PennDOT already screens driver's license applicants for citizenship before presenting an opt-out screen for automatic voter registration.
- House Republicans once again pressed DOS to detail how much money was saved as a result of changes to automatic voter registration unilaterally implemented by the Shapiro Administration. DOS was unable to provide an amount, despite promises of efficiency in the Governor's announcement.
- In the current fiscal year, DOS is projected to spend \$1 million on special elections, and \$400,000 is proposed for FY 2026-27. Since 2017, Pennsylvania has spent \$4.4 million on special elections.
 - Secretary Schmidt did not provide an opinion when asked if this is an appropriate use of funds, given that these elections could be held during regularly scheduled Primary or General Elections.
- Members inquired about the Governor's proposal to add \$1.4 million in Voter Education funds, an increase of nearly 250%. House Republicans expressed concern and sought to ensure that such funds would not be used in a partisan or geographically biased manner.
- In addition to administering elections, DOS also issues professional licenses.
 - The Governor's proposal included a promise to update the professional licensure process. Members learned that DOS is working to integrate the education and licensing process so graduates with a professional degree can meet their licensing requirements faster.
 - Members also asked for an update on the ability to move some licenses over to less onerous certificates. Secretary Schmidt indicated this will be included in a report that will be released soon.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Jamie Barton presses Secretary Schmidt to offer an opinion on special election reforms, which could save the Commonwealth millions.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer asks for an update on the Governor's announcement to update our Professional Licensure programs.



Rep. Eric Davazo inquires about safeguards to prevent non-citizens from registering to vote.