

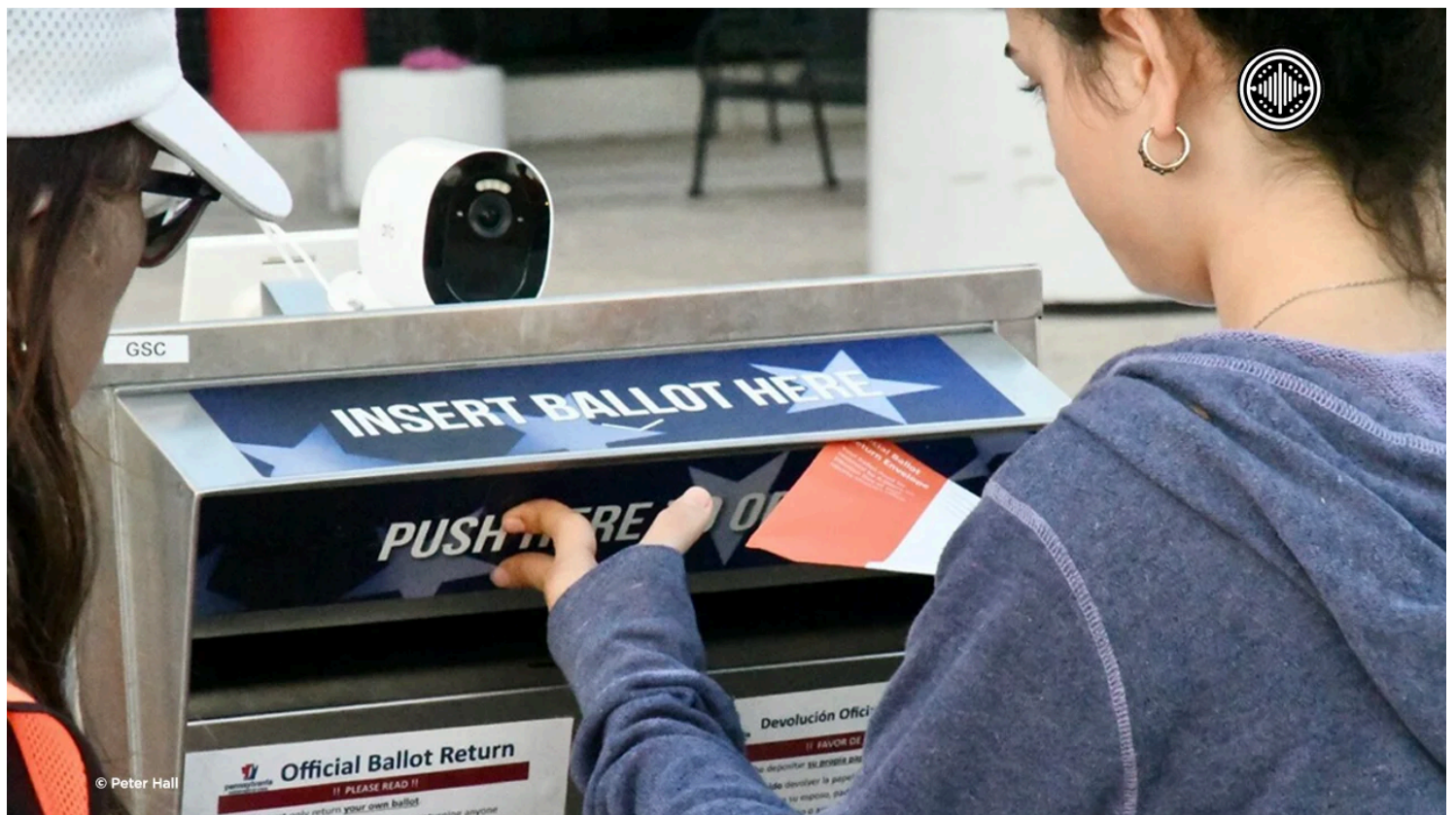
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DOJ Demands Pennsylvania Voter Records in New Election Probe

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The U.S. Department of Justice has formally asked Pennsylvania officials to provide a full copy of the state's voter rolls, including sensitive personal details such as Social Security numbers and driver's license information. This request, delivered in a letter to Pennsylvania Secretary of the Commonwealth Al Schmidt on August 4, marks a significant expansion in federal demands for state voter data.

The letter states that the DOJ is seeking the information under the authority of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), citing the need to verify Pennsylvania's compliance with federal election law. However, election law experts have expressed concerns that the scope of this request may exceed what the law permits.

Justin Levitt, a Loyola Law School professor and former Justice Department civil rights official, told Votebeat and Spotlight PA that asking for such detailed personal information is unusual and potentially unlawful. "The NVRA allows for public access to voter registration data, but it does not require the release of all fields, especially sensitive details like Social Security numbers," Levitt said.

Pennsylvania's voter rolls are already publicly available for a small fee, but these versions exclude sensitive personal identifiers. Courts have consistently ruled that the NVRA does not mandate disclosure of such private information. Levitt pointed out that the DOJ's request for personal voter data is unnecessary to assess whether Pennsylvania maintains clean voter lists. "Knowing an individual's Social Security number tells you nothing about the state's overall list maintenance program," he added.

This demand comes amid recent legal battles over voter data privacy. The DOJ previously sued Orange County, California, over similar data redaction issues. Pennsylvania itself has resisted releasing such information in the past, citing privacy concerns.

The DOJ's letter also requests explanations from Pennsylvania about its responses to the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS), conducted biannually by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. Specifically, the DOJ questions why Pennsylvania reported fewer duplicate registrations than average and why there were comparatively few voter registration applications from military recruitment offices.

Additionally, the department seeks detailed voting histories of any individuals removed from the voter rolls since the 2022 midterm elections due to noncitizenship, felony convictions, or legal incompetency.

Harmeet Dhillon, assistant attorney general for civil rights, emphasized the administration's commitment to election integrity in a statement to Votebeat and Spotlight PA. "Clean voter rolls and robust election safeguards are prerequisites for free, fair, and transparent elections," Dhillon said. "The DOJ Civil Rights Division has a statutory mandate to enforce federal voting laws and to ensure public confidence in our elections."

The Pennsylvania Department of State was asked to respond within two weeks of receiving the request. As of Thursday evening, officials confirmed no response had yet been submitted.