IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

In Re: Nomination Petition of

William Anderson As

Democratic Candidate for

State Representative in the : No. 161 M.D. 2022 24th Legislative District : Heard: April 7, 2022

:

Objection of: Nicole M. Sylvester,

Christopher Paul Sandvig,

and Loreal RJ Snell

BEFORE: HONORABLE MICHAEL H. WOJCIK, Judge

MEMORANDUM and ORDER

Presently before the Court is the Petition to Set Aside the Nomination Petition of William Anderson (Candidate) as a Democratic candidate for nomination to the office of Representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly for the 24th Legislative District in the General Primary Election (Primary Election) to be held on May 17, 2022. On April 3, 2022, Nicole M. Sylvester, Christopher Paul Sandvig, and Loreal RJ Snell (Objectors) filed the Petition to Set Aside Candidate's Nomination Petition in this Court.

Pursuant to Section 912.1(14) of the Pennsylvania Election Code (Election Code),² a candidate for the office of Representative in the General

¹ Pursuant to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's order in *In re: Petition for Review Challenging the Final 2021 Legislative Reapportionment Plan* (Pa., No. 569 Judicial Administrative Docket, filed March 16, 2022), Candidate was required to circulate and file his Nomination Petition with the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of State (Secretary of the Commonwealth, or Secretary) on or before March 28, 2022. Pursuant to that same order, Objectors were required to file their Petition to Set Aside in this Court on or before April 4, 2022. *See id.*

² Act of June 3, 1937, P.L. 1333, added by the Act of December 12, 1984, P.L. 968, as amended, 25 P.S. §2872.1(14). Section 912.1(14) of the Election Code states: "Candidates for (Footnote continued on next page...)

Assembly must present at least 300 valid signatures of registered and enrolled electors of the candidate's political party. On or before March 28, 2022, Candidate filed a Nomination Petition with the Secretary of the Commonwealth to appear on the Primary Election ballot for that office consisting of 27 pages containing 493 signatures of presumably qualified electors.

On April 3, 2022, Objectors filed the Petition to Set Aside Candidate's Nomination Petition in this Court alleging, *inter alia*, that the Nomination Petition contains fewer than the required 300 signatures, contesting the validity of 326 signatures appearing therein. Specifically, in relevant part, Objectors contend that 188 of the signatures on the Nomination Petition are those of individuals who are either not registered to vote in Candidate's Legislative District³ or are not registered

nomination of offices as listed below shall present a nominating petition containing at least as many valid signatures of registered and enrolled members of the proper party as listed below: . . . Representative in the General Assembly: Three hundred."

The names . . . of all other candidates for party nominations, . . . shall be printed upon the official primary ballots or ballot labels of a designated party, upon the filing of separate nomination petitions in their behalf, in form prescribed by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, signed by duly registered and enrolled members of such party who are qualified electors . . . of the political district . . . within which the nomination is to be made

25 P.S. §2867. Section 908 of the Election Code states, in pertinent part: "Each signer of a nomination petition . . . shall also declare therein that he is a qualified elector . . . of the political district therein named, in which the nomination is to be made" 25 P.S. §2868. As a result, the signatures of individuals who do not reside in the 24th Legislative District appearing on Candidate's Nomination Petition are invalid and will be stricken. *In re Morrison-Wesley*, 946 A.2d 789, 795-96 (Pa. Cmwlth.), *aff'd*, 944 A.2d 78 (Pa. 2008); *Petition of Thompson*, 516 A.2d 1278, 1280 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984).

³ Section 907 of the Election Code states, in relevant part:

to vote at the address provided on the Nomination Petition by those individuals.⁴ In addition, Objectors contest signatures on pages of the Nomination Petition that were circulated by individuals who failed to execute the Statement of the Circulator appended thereto at the end of the page.⁵ Finally, Objectors contest the 17 signature lines on Page 23 of the Nomination Petition because the circulator was not a registered and enrolled member of the Democratic party, circulator.⁶

Each sheet shall have appended thereto the statement of the circulator of each sheet, setting forth, subject the penalties of [Section 4904 of the Crimes Code,] 18 Pa. C.S. §4904 (relating to unsworn falsification to authorities)—(a)that he or she is a qualified elector of the Commonwealth, who is duly registered and enrolled as a member of the party designated in said petition[;] (b) his residence, giving city, borough or township, with street and number, if any; (c) that the signers thereto signed with full knowledge of the contents of the petition; (d) that their respective residences are correctly stated therein; (e) that they all reside in the county named in the statement; (f) that each signed on the date set opposite his name; and (g) that, to the best of the circulator's knowledge and belief, the signers are qualified electors and duly registered and enrolled members of the designated party of the State, or of the political district, as the case may be.

25 P.S. §2869. "[N]omination petitions with improperly completed [circulator] affidavits are amendable at the discretion of the Court, while nomination petitions with no affidavits at all leave nothing to be amended and are, therefore, fatally defective." *In re Nominating Petition of Kloiber*, 362 A.2d 484, 485 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1976).

⁴ Section 908 of the Election Code also states, in relevant part: "Each signer of a nomination petition . . . shall add his address where he is duly registered and enrolled, giving city, borough or township with street and number, if any" 25 P.S. §2868. The Supreme Court has recently stated: "We now hold the [Election Code] as amended plainly and unambiguously requires the signer to use the address where he or she is duly registered and enrolled, on pain of disqualification of the signature." *In re Major*, 248 A.3d 445, 454 (Pa. 2021).

⁵ Section 909 of the Election Code states, in relevant part:

⁶ Section 909 of the Election Code states, in pertinent part: **(Footnote continued on next page...)**

Said nomination petition may be on one or more sheets, and different sheets must be used for signers resident in different counties. If more than one sheet is used, they shall be bound together when offered for filing if they are intended to constitute one petition, and each sheet shall be numbered consecutively beginning with number one, at the foot of each page. . . . Each sheet shall have appended thereto the statement of the circulator of each sheet, setting forth, subject to the penalties of [Section 4904 of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code,] 18 Pa. C.S. §4904 (relating to unsworn falsification to authorities)[,] . . . that he or she is a qualified elector of the Commonwealth, who is duly registered and enrolled as a member of the party designated in said petition[.]

25 P.S. §2869.

The validity of the foregoing requirements of Section 909 of the Election Code is manifest. As the Third Circuit Court of Appeals has explained:

While we have not spoken directly on the issue of registration requirements for petition circulators, the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit had occasion to do so in Maslow v. Board of Elections in the City of New York, 658 F.3d 291 (2d Cir. 2011). There, the Court rejected a challenge to a nearly identical New York election law. Citing [California Democratic Party v. Jones, 530] U.S. 567, 574-75 (2000)], the Court emphasized the importance of a political party being able to exclude in the nominee selection process. *Id.* at 296. In addition, the Court opined that "Plaintiffs are only restrained from engaging in speech that is inseparably bound up with the . . . plaintiffs' association with a political party to which they do not belong. As plaintiffs have no right to this association, they have no right to engage in any speech collateral to it." Id. at 298. Moreover, the Court concluded that "the State has a legitimate interest in protecting its political parties from party raiding." Id. The Second Circuit's reasoning is persuasive and applicable to the provision before us. The District Court was correct to dismiss Appellant's challenge to the registration requirement.

De La Fuentes v. Cortes, 751 Fed. Appx. 269, 274-75 (3rd Cir. 2018). See also in re Nomination Petitions of Smith, 182 A.3d 12, 22-23 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2018) (holding that the same-party requirement of Section 909 does not violate the First Amendment to the United States Constitution (Footnote continued on next page...)

On April 4, 2022,⁷ this Court entered a Scheduling and Case Management Order scheduling a hearing on the Petition to Set Aside for April 7, 2022, at 9:30 a.m., and imposing certain duties and obligations upon Objectors and Candidate.⁸ Specifically, therein: (1) Objectors were ordered to secure the services

and, as a result, striking 14 signatures obtained by a registered Republican circulator for a candidate seeking the nomination of the Democratic Party for the Office of State Representative).

Our adjustment of the primary election calendar does not alter the discretion vested in the Commonwealth Court, which will be tasked in its original jurisdiction with hearing any objections to nominating petitions. [Section 977 of t]he Election Code provides a very restrictive time schedule, specifically including a ten[-]day cut-off for hearings and a fifteen[-]day deadline for decisions. 25 P.S. §2937. However, this Court recognized that appeals of this nature entail the "exercise of purely judicial functions." *In re Nomination Petition of Moore*, []291 A.2d 531, 534 (Pa. 1972). Thus, as it respects the judicial function, the Election Code's deadlines are understood in this context as "directory," although the deadlines and requirements of the [Election] Code will remain mandatory as to petitioners. *See also Mellow v. Mitchell*, []607 A.2d 204, 224 (Pa. 1992) (same); *In re Shapp*, []383 A.2d 201, 204 (Pa. 1978) (same).

Holt 2011 Legislative Reapportionment Commission, 38 A.3d 711, 721 n.10 (Pa. 2012). See also In re Ross, 109 A.3d 781, 785 (Pa. Cmwlth.), aff'd, 101 A.3d 1150 (Pa. 2014) ("[T]his Court, as an intermediate appellate court is bound to follow the majority opinions of our Supreme Court, not the dissents, unless and until the Supreme Court overrules those majority opinions or it is clear that they are no longer good law.") (citations omitted).

The purpose of scheduling and case management orders in election cases is to facilitate the proceedings in an expeditious and timely (Footnote continued on next page...)

⁷ The Supreme Court's April 4, 2022 order in *In re: Petition for Review Challenging the Final 2021 Legislative Reapportionment Plan* (Pa., No. 569 Judicial Administrative Docket, filed April 4, 2022), directed this Court to hold all hearings on objections that have been filed to nomination petitions, and to render decisions in cases involving objections to nomination petitions, on or before April 13, 2022. Nevertheless, as that Court has previously explained:

⁸ As this Court has observed:

of a court stenographer and a Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors (SURE) System⁹ operator for the hearing; (2) Objectors were ordered to immediately arrange to meet with Candidate or his representative and, if appropriate, with a SURE System operator, to review before the hearing each and every challenged signature; (3) Objectors and Candidate were ordered to file a Stipulation of the Parties identifying the total number of signature lines, the total number of uncontested signature lines, the total number of signature lines challenged, each and every signature line challenged by page number and line number, and each and every signature to be stricken off as invalid or for which an objection is to be withdrawn; (4) Objectors and Candidate were permitted to file a memorandum of law in support of their respective positions; (5) the parties shall make a good faith effort to file all of the foregoing items no later than 24 hours in advance of the April 7, 2022 hearing; and (6) the failure to comply with any provision of the order may preclude the noncompliant party from entering any evidence and may result in the imposition of monetary sanctions.

manner due to the extreme time limitations placed on election matters. That is why objectors are ordered to immediately arrange to meet with the candidate or his/her representative to reach a stipulation as to the number of signatures that are challenged and/or valid. In short, time is of the essence in election matters. As such, the Court expects compliance.

In re Ford, 994 A.2d 9, 12 n.3 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010) overruled in part on other grounds by In re Nomination Petition of Gales, 54 A.3d 855, 860-61 (Pa. 2012).

⁹ As this Court has previously explained, "[t]he SURE system is the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors, the statewide database of voter registration maintained by the Department of State and administered by each county." *In re Nomination Petition of Morrison-Wesley*, 946 A.2d 789, 792-93 n. 4 (Pa. Cmwlth.), *aff* d, 944 A.2d 78 (Pa. 2008).

With regard to the signature challenges, Objectors secured the services of an operator of the SURE System who is employed by the Allegheny County Bureau of Elections. At the April 7, 2022 hearing, the SURE System operator accessed the SURE System and retrieved voter information, when possible, corresponding to the signature lines of the Nomination Petition.¹⁰

We initially note that "in reviewing election issues, 'we must consider the longstanding and overriding policy in our Commonwealth to protect the elective franchise,' and that the Election Code must 'be liberally construed to protect a candidate's right to run for office and the voters' right to elect the candidate of their choice." *In re James*, 944 A.2d 69, 72 (Pa. 2008) (citation omitted). The purpose of the Election Code is to protect, not defeat, a citizen's vote. *Dayhoff v. Weaver*, 808 A.2d 1002, 1006 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2002). However, "the policy of the liberal reading of the Election Code cannot be distorted to emasculate those requirements

THE POSTING OF A SCHEDULING AND CASE MANAGEMENT ORDER SHALL CONSTITUTE SERVICE OF THE ORDER ON THE OBJECTOR AND CANDIDATE. ALL PARTIES ARE UNDER A CONTINUING OBLIGATION TO CHECK THE COURT'S WEBSITE TO CONFIRM WHETHER A SCHEDULING AND CASE MANAGEMENT ORDER HAS BEEN ISSUED WITH RESPECT TO ANY OBJECTION PETITION.

Moreover, Objectors' counsel outlined on the record his attempts to communicate with Candidate via the email address that Candidate provided to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, that the emails were not "bounced back" as undeliverable, and that he received no response from Candidate to those emails.

¹⁰ Candidate did not appear for the hearing on the objections. An employee of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas searched for Candidate or counsel outside of the courtroom. We note that our order in *In re: Objections to Nomination Petitions for Pennsylvania General Assembly and State Party Committees - General Primary Election 2022* (Pa. Cmwlth., No. 126 Misc. Dkt. No. 3, filed March 25, 2022), states, in relevant part:

necessary to assure the probity of the process." *In re Cianfrani*, 359 A.2d 383, 384 (Pa. 1976). "It is not for us to legislate or by interpretation to add to legislation matters which the legislature saw fit not to include." *Commonwealth ex rel. Fox v. Swing*, 186 A.2d 24, 27 (Pa. 1962).

Furthermore, "[a] party alleging defects in a nominating petition has the burden of proving such defects, as nomination petitions are presumed to be valid." *In re Beyer*, 115 A.3d 835, 838 (Pa. 2015). This Court is "[e]ntrusted with the responsibility of protecting the Commonwealth's compelling interest in preserving the integrity of the election process." *In re Nomination Papers of Carlson*, 430 A.2d 1210, 1212 (Pa. Cmwlth.), *aff'd*, 430 A.2d 1155 (Pa. 1981). The Supreme Court may reverse our order concerning the validity of challenges to nomination petitions only if our findings of fact are not supported by substantial evidence, if we abused our discretion, or if we committed an error of law. *In re Beyer*, 115 A.3d at 838.

As outlined above, the sole legal issue presented in this matter is the validity of 194 of the challenged signatures to meet the threshold number of 300 signatures required by Section 912.1(14) of the Election Code. Based on the credible evidence adduced at the April 7, 2022 hearing, we struck the following signature lines on the basis that the circulator of Page 23 of the Nomination Petition is not a registered Democratic elector as required by Section 909 of the Election Code:

- Page 23, Line 1
- Page 23, Line 2
- Page 23, Line 3
- Page 23, Line 4
- Page 23, Line 5
- Page 23, Line 6
- Page 23, Line 7
- Page 23, Line 8
- Page 23, Line 9
- Page 23, Line 10

- Page 23, Line 11
- Page 23, Line 12
- Page 23, Line 13
- Page 23, Line 14
- Page 23, Line 15
- Page 23, Line 16
- Page 23, Line 17

Subtracting the aforementioned 17 signature lines, Candidate's Nomination Petition contains a total number of 476 signatures that are presumed to be valid.

Based on the credible evidence adduced at the April 7, 2022 hearing, we struck the following signature lines on the basis that the circulator failed to execute the Statement of Circulator appended to Page 26 of the Nomination Petition:

- Page 26, Line 1
- Page 26, Line 2
- Page 26, Line 4

Subtracting the aforementioned 3 signature lines, Candidate's Nomination Petition contains a total number of 473 signatures that are presumed to be valid.

Based on the credible evidence adduced at the April 7, 2022 hearing, we struck the following signature lines on the basis that the individual was not registered to vote at the address provided on the Nomination Petition:

- Page 1, Line 16
- Page 2, Line 7
- Page 3, Line 11
- Page 3, Line 14
- Page 3, Line 22
- Page 4, Line 4
- Page 5, Line 20
- Page 5, Line 21
- Page 5, Line 24
- Page 5, Line 28
- Page 6, Line 7
- Page 6, Line 15
- Page 6, Line 19
- Page 6, Line 27

- Page 7, Line 6
- Page 7, Line 25
- Page 8, Line 4
- Page 8, Line 12
- Page 8, Line 17
- Page 8, Line 28
- Page 9, Line 6
- Page 9, Line 7
- Page 9, Line 12
- Page 9, Line 15
- Page 9, Line 17
- Page 9, Line 20
- Page 9, Line 21
- Page 11, Line 17
- Page 11, Line 18
- Page 11, Line 24
- Page 13, Line 11
- Page 14, Line 3
- Page 15, Line 6
- Page 15, Line 7
- Page 16, Line 6
- Page 16, Line 12
- Page 16, Line 17
- Page 18, Line 2
- Page 20, Line 2
- Page 21, Line 26
- Page 21, Line 28

Subtracting the aforementioned 41 signature lines, Candidate's Nomination Petition contains a total number of 432 signatures that are presumed to be valid.

Based upon the credible evidence adduced at the April 7, 2022 hearing, we struck the following signature lines on the basis that the individual was not registered to vote in the 24th Legislative District:

- Page 1, Line 3
- Page 1, Line 19
- Page 1, Line 26
- Page 2, Line 1
- Page 2, Line 2
- Page 2, Line 3

- Page 2, Line 5
- Page 2, Line 14
- Page 2, Line 15
- Page 2, Line 24
- Page 3, Line 4
- Page 3, Line 9
- Page 3, Line 13
- Page 3, Line 18
- Page 3, Line 19
- Page 3, Line 20
- Page 3, Line 23
- Page 3, Line 29
- Page 4, Line 2
- Page 5, Line 13
- Page 5, Line 17
- Page 5, Line 18
- Page 5, Line 19
- Page 5, Line 22
- Page 5, Line 23
- Page 5, Line 25
- Page 5, Line 26
- Page 5, Line 27
- Page 5, Line 29
- Page 5, Line 30
- Page 6, Line 5
- Page 6, Line 9 Page 6, Line 12
- Page 6, Line 13
- Page 6, Line 14
- Page 6, Line 18
- Page 6, Line 22
- Page 7, Line 1
- Page 7, Line 2
- Page 7, Line 3
- Page 7, Line 5
- Page 7, Line 10
- Page 7, Line 18
- Page 7, Line 19
- Page 7, Line 23
- Page 7, Line 24
- Page 7, Line 26
- Page 7, Line 28
- Page 8, Line 15

- Page 8, Line 16
- Page 9, Line 1
- Page 9, Line 2
- Page 9, Line 13
- Page 9, Line 14
- Page 9, Line 16
- Page 9, Line 24
- Page 11, Line 8
- Page 11, Line 9
- Page 11, Line 10
- Page 11, Line 11
- Page 11, Line 12
- Page 11, Line 13
- Page 11, Line 14
- Page 11, Line 21
- Page 11, Line 22
- Page 11, Line 23
- Page 13, Line 2
- Page 13, Line 8
- Page 13, Line 15
- Page 13, Line 20
- Page 14, Line 2
- Page 14, Line 6
- Page 14, Line 9
- Page 15, Line 2
- Page 15, Line 3
- Page 15, Line 5
- Page 16, Line 7
- Page 16, Line 8
- Page 16, Line 10 Page 16, Line 13
- Page 16, Line 14
- Page 16, Line 16 Page 16, Line 18
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- Page 16, Line 20
- Page 16, Line 21 Page 16, Line 22
- Page 16, Line 24
- Page 16, Line 25
- Page 16, Line 26
- Page 16, Line 27
- Page 16, Line 28

- Page 16, Line 29
- Page 17, Line 1
- Page 17, Line 2
- Page 17, Line 3
- Page 17, Line 7
- Page 18, Line 1
- Page 19, Line 1
- Page 20, Line 1
- Page 20, Line 3
- Page 20, Line 5
- Page 20, Line 6
- Page 21, Line 1
- Page 21, Line 2
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- Page 21, Line 23
- Page 21, Line 24
- Page 21, Line 25
- Page 21, Line 27Page 21, Line 29
- Page 21, Line 30

Subtracting the aforementioned 127 signature lines, Candidate's Nomination Petition contains a total number of 305 signatures that are presumed to be valid.

Based upon the credible evidence adduced at the April 7, 2022 hearing, we struck the following signature lines on the basis that the individual was not

registered to vote as a Democratic elector in the General Primary Election to be held on May 17, 2022:

- Page 2, Line 22
- Page 3, Line 7
- Page 3, Line 8
- Page 3, Line 26
- Page 5, Line 14
- Page 6, Line 17
- Page 7, Line 30
- Page 8, Line 22
- Page 9, Line 19
- Page 14, Line 4

Subtracting the aforementioned 10 signature lines, Candidate's Nomination Petition contains a total number of 295 signatures that are presumed to be valid.

Accordingly, based on the foregoing, and in compliance with the Supreme Court's April 4, 2022 order in *In re: Petition for Review Challenging the Final 2021 Legislative Reapportionment Plan*, we issue the following:

ORDER

AND NOW, this 8th day of April, 2022, it is hereby ORDERED:

1. Based upon the credible evidence admitted at the April 7, 2022 hearing before this Court, the Nomination Petition of William Anderson as a Democratic candidate for nomination to the office of Representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly for the 24th Legislative District in the General Primary Election to be held on May 17, 2022, does not contain 300 valid signatures of qualified and enrolled electors as required by Section 912.1(14) of the Election Code, 25 P.S. §2872.1(14); the Petition to Set Aside the said Nomination Petition of

William Anderson is GRANTED; and the said Nomination Petition of William Anderson is hereby SET ASIDE.

- 2. The Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is directed to REMOVE from the ballot the name of William Anderson as a Candidate for the Democratic Nomination to the office of Representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly for the 24th Legislative District in the General Primary Election of May 17, 2022.
 - 3. Each party shall bear his or her own costs.
- 4. The Prothonotary shall notify the parties hereto and their counsel of this order and shall also certify a copy hereof to the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania forthwith.

MICHAEL H. WOJCIK, Judge

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN RE: TEMPORARY MODIFICATION : No. 571 Judicial Administration Docket

OF THE RULES OF APPELLATE PROCEDURE ARISING UNDER THE

PENNSYLVANIA ELECTION CODE :

ORDER

PER CURIAM

AND NOW, this 5th day of April, 2022, in order to expedite the appellate process regarding appeals from challenges to nomination petitions for **any and all** candidates running for office in the May 17, 2022 General Primary Election, Pa.R.A.P. 903(c)(1)(ii), providing for a ten-day appeal period from an order in any matter arising under the Pennsylvania Election Code, is **TEMPORARILY MODIFIED** to provide for a five-day appeal period.

Additionally, Pa.R.A.P. 107 is **TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED** to the extent it specifies that weekends and holidays are to be excluded from calculating the five-day appeal period.

In appeals arising under the Election Code that fall within this order, appellants shall file briefs within twenty-four hours after filing their notice of appeal and jurisdictional statement. Appellees' briefs are due within twenty-four hours of the filing of appellants' briefs. Further, Pa.R.A.P. 2113 (regarding reply briefs) is **TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED** in these matters; no reply briefs will be permitted.

Notices of appeal, jurisdictional statements, and briefs shall be filed electronically when counsel or the litigants have a PACFile account. Otherwise, counsel or the litigants shall contact the relevant filing office during normal business hours to make alternative arrangements to ensure that the filing office actually receives the submissions by the applicable deadline.

Pa.R.A.P. 1931(a) and (c) (regarding the deadline for transmittal of the record

when complete) are **TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED** in these matters, and the record shall

be transferred as soon as practicable. The lower court may transmit partially completed

records in the interest of facilitating prompt resolution of any appeal in these matters.

Applications for reconsideration or reargument will not be entertained by this Court

on election matters falling under this order.

Any court deciding a matter that arises under the Pennsylvania Election Code in

relation to the May 17, 2022 General Primary Election shall append a copy of this order

to its decision.

A True Copy Nicole Traini As Of 04/05/2022

Chief Clerk Supreme Court of Pennsylvania