



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

FROM: Elizabeth Randol, Legislative Director, ACLU of Pennsylvania

DATE: June 19, 2022

RE: OPPOSITION TO SB 982 P.N. 1264 (BAKER)

Bill summary: [SB 982](#) (PN 1264) would amend the [PA Election Code](#) to prohibit the use of non-public monies for the administration of elections. SB 982 would require election expenses to be funded only by federal, state or local revenue appropriations derived from taxes, fees, and other sources of public revenue.

Additionally, SB 982 would prohibit state and local governments from soliciting, applying for, entering into contract with or receiving gifts, donations, grants or funding from a nongovernmental entity for election expenses. **A violation of this provision would constitute a felony of the second degree, punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$25,000—the same grading as involuntary manslaughter of a child and statutory sexual assault.**

On behalf of over 100,000 members and supporters of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 982.

SB 982 is an overreaction to county election offices that received nonprofit funds in 2020 to assist with COVID-19-related preparation for the general election—funding that the legislature failed to provide.

SB 982 was filed in response to the [CTCL grants](#) (Center for Tech and Civic Life) that assisted counties with COVID-19-related preparation for the 2020 elections. There were NO restrictions on those grants; all counties were free to apply for those funds. Had that money not been available, some counties would not have been able to run elections in 2020. Most counties need temporary staff and most don't have the resources to hire. Because the legislature has repeatedly failed to properly fund elections, and counties were desperate to have the resources needed to run fair elections safely during a pandemic, these grants patched a critical funding gap. If the legislature is committed to banning third-party grants from elections, then the General Assembly should include a provision to provide increased funding for county election offices.

Regarding the CTCL grants in particular:

- The CTCL grants were opt-in, and [every legitimate jurisdiction that requested money received a grant](#). More than half of the grants were made to small jurisdictions, serving fewer than 25,000 voters. The only jurisdictions that did not receive grant funding were jurisdictions that did not ask for it.
- [There were no partisan questions in the grant applications](#). Grant funding decisions were not made on a partisan basis. As demonstrated by the jurisdictions across the political spectrum that received money, partisan considerations played no role in the availability or awarding of funding.
- Unfortunately, partisan politics arguably did play a role in which jurisdictions chose to apply for the funding.
- Nationally, more than a dozen frivolous lawsuits were filed to discredit the CTCL COVID-19 Response Grants program. [Every judge](#)—conservative, liberal, and two Republican-appointed Supreme Court Justices—rejected these challenges, with one judge issuing a strongly-worded opinion in one case that labeled these challenges a “conspiracy theory.”

- In Pennsylvania, [Republican](#) federal Judge Matthew Brann [ruled that](#) CTCL grant recipients “have used CTCL funding in a nonpartisan way to facilitate the upcoming election; they have spent the CTCL money to set up satellite election offices, offer dropboxes, and pay for various election-related expenses. Defendants have notably not attempted to use the CTCL funds to increase voter turnout by, for example, implementing get-out-the-vote efforts. ... Further, nothing in the record suggests that, if ... use of the CTCL funding does increase voter turnout, it will necessarily benefit progressive candidates. The implication that increased voter turnout is inherently beneficial to progressive candidates is dubious at best.”

All 67 counties in Pennsylvania—red or blue, urban or rural—deserve the necessary funding to run secure and accessible elections. The General Assembly should protect the freedom to vote for all Pennsylvanians by fully funding our county elections offices so they don’t need to turn to nonprofits for assistance. But until the legislature is willing to do so, it should not tie the hands of local elections officials—and it **certainly should not threaten county election workers with second-degree felony charges for seeking assistance in the absence of adequate state funding.**

For these reasons, we urge you to oppose Senate Bill 982.