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More than 8% of York County voters applied for mail-in, absentee ballots

Pennlive
Many Pennsylvania counties can look forward to starting to reopen come May 8. How close are you?

Allentown Morning Call
Republican lawmakers vote to subpoena Wolf documents on business closures, with audit looming

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) on Thursday voted, 4-0, to approve a year-long implementation plan leading to the start of a new “overlay” for the current 814 area code. The area code covers all or parts of 27 counties across central and northwestern Pennsylvania. Under the overlay plan approved Thursday, a new area code will be assigned to the same geographic area currently covered by the 814-area code.

In the future – when no more 814 telephone numbers are available – telephone numbers from the new area code will be assigned to customers. This preserves existing phone numbers for residents and businesses in the region, while also ensuring that a supply of new numbers will be available for decades to come. “First and foremost, it is important for residents and businesses throughout the 814-area code to understand that there will be no change in their telephone service,” stressed PUC Chairman Gladys Brown Dutrieuille. “The proposal approved by the commission ensures that customers currently using 814 telephone numbers will keep their existing numbers, and the PUC is launching a year-long education campaign to help everyone prepare for a second ‘local’ area code in the region.”

The PUC notes that the biggest adjustment for residents will be the eventual switch to “10-digit dialing” – where callers will be required to dial the area code plus the seven-digit telephone number for all calls. To help consumers and businesses in the region adjust to the upcoming change, the PUC has approved a timetable to implement the new overlay area code, including the following key dates:

- April 30, 2020 – Plan approved/Education efforts begin.
- October 1, 2020 – Residents and businesses are encouraged to voluntarily start 10-digit dialing for calls in the 814-area code.
- April 1, 2021 – 10-digit dialing will be required for all calls.
- May 1, 2021 – The new overlay area code will be placed into service. (New area code numbers will not be assigned until available 814 numbers are exhausted)

Between now and the spring of 2021, the PUC will work with consumers, business, community leaders, legislators and others across the region to help everyone prepare for the arrival of the new area code. The 814-area code – which was established in 1947 and is one of Pennsylvania’s four original area codes. It includes cities such as Altoona, Erie, Johnstown and State College.

It covers all or parts of 27 counties, including Armstrong (northeastern portion only); Bedford; Blair; Cambria; Cameron; Centre (majority of the county); Clarion (all except portions of west); Clearfield; Clinton (small portions); Crawford (all except southwestern portion); Elk; Erie; Fayette (small portions); Forest; Fulton (western portions); Huntingdon (except Kishacoquillas Valley); Indiana (northern and eastern portions only); Jefferson; McKean; Mercer (extreme northeastern portion); Mifflin (extreme southwestern corner); Potter; Somerset; Tioga (western portions only); Venango (all except southeastern corner); Warren; and Westmoreland (extreme northeastern corner only).

It is the largest area code in the state and the last to undergo changes because existing phone numbers have been exhausted. The area code relief plan approved by the commission was submitted by Somos Inc., the neutral third party North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA) for Pennsylvania. Based on current forecast predictions, the supply of phone numbers available in the 814-area code is projected to be exhausted in 2022.

The new overlay area code will be assigned by NANPA and will be announced in the fall of 2020. This new overlay area code is projected to provide telephone numbers to the region for approximately 67 years. Per Thursday’s commission order, the telecommunications industry must complete all the necessary network preparations for the new overlay by Oct. 1. Additionally, the PUC will receive monthly updates on the projected exhaust date for the 814-area code. – **PUC**

Philadelphia Inquirer
Pa.'s four congresswomen will campaign for Joe Biden as he faces pressure on sexual-assault accusation

Gov. Tom Wolf spoke with the news media Thursday morning about the coronavirus and his plans on reopening Pennsylvania. Wolf answered questions on a variety of topics in the 30-minute conference call, including schools, nursing homes, businesses and the waiver program that allowed some companies to open their doors and kept others closed.

Wolf was asked about lifting restrictions in certain counties. He said more specifics would be announced Friday. Pennsylvania remains under a statewide stay-at-home order to slow the spread of the coronavirus. More than 44,000 people have contracted the virus and nearly 2,200 have died. The governor said he plans to begin lifting restrictions on some regions in early May. On Friday, the Wolf administration is slated to announce the first counties to be lifted from the stay-at-home order. Wolf didn't offer any hints on which counties would be chosen. "We haven't made up the list yet," Wolf said.

Wolf has announced a three-phase plan to reopen Pennsylvania: red, yellow and green. Those counties chosen to reopen would move into the yellow phase on May 8. In the yellow phase, some businesses would be able to reopen but working remotely would still be encouraged. Casinos, gyms and theaters would still be closed. Wolf said as communities move into the yellow phase, "We're going to have to behave differently than we did." He said it'd still be important to wear masks and limit social interactions.

For counties moving into the yellow phase, Wolf said, "It'll be an experiment for families, schools and businesses to figure out, 'How do we live in this new world?'" The governor is lifting restrictions on some businesses. Beginning Friday, construction activity can resume, with some limits on the number of workers on certain types of projects. The construction industry has been brought to a virtual standstill. Golf courses, private campgrounds and marinas can also reopen Friday.

The governor was asked about possibly opening the next school year earlier to make up for lost academic time. Earlier this week, California Gov. Gavin Newsom said schools in his state could open in July to help address the learning loss due to schools being closed in the spring. Wolf said the state is having ongoing conversations about reopening schools in the fall. "We're trying to figure out how we can follow on a thorough and efficient education for Pennsylvania," Wolf said. "The conversations extend all over the place, beyond when schools reopen," Wolf said.

Schools have been closed for the rest of the spring, meaning 1.7 million Pennsylvania students are learning remotely. Wolf said the state has put forth a plan to continue teaching through the end of this school year to fulfill an obligation under the state constitution to provide a robust education. Earlier this week, state Education Secretary Pedro Rivera talked about the possibility of opening schools for in-person classes in the fall. "We're planning for the best but preparing for the worst, Rivera said. Whether schools reopen rests first and foremost on what is best for students' health and safety, Rivera told reporters on a conference call. Right now, Rivera said, "there's a great deal of uncertainty."

Those counties, which Wolf has said will likely be in northcentral and northwestern Pennsylvania, will see the stay-at-home order lifted on May 8. Wolf was asked about the deaths of residents in long-term facilities, such as nursing homes. More than 60 percent of the state's COVID-19 deaths have been in long-term facilities. He said the state would look at what's going on in long-term facilities in making decisions about reopening parts of the state. In some counties, a large portion of the infections are in nursing homes.

Long-term care facilities are places that are vulnerable to a higher rate of infection, Wolf said. The governor was asked about identifying nursing homes where COVID-19 cases and deaths have been reported. The state is not listing

the names of the homes. Wolf has said he's bound by state law that requires some patient privacy protections. "The debate and conversation will continue," Wolf said. He added his administration "will try to be as open as we possibly can. Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said Thursday he's going to do an audit on the waiver program. On the conference call, Wolf said he welcomes the audit. "I think that's a great thing," Wolf said. He added the auditor general is in a great position to examine and determine the fairness of the program.

The governor has also closed businesses that aren't deemed life-sustaining. Some lawmakers and trade groups have said Wolf has shut down businesses too widely and argue that many small businesses could safely operate with appropriate safeguards. A Senate panel plans to vote Thursday afternoon on possibly issuing [subpoenas to Wolf's administration to learn more about business closures prompted by the coronavirus pandemic](#). Specifically, Senate Republicans, which control that chamber, want to learn more about the state's waiver program that allowed some businesses to open their doors.

Some lawmakers and business groups have said the waiver process has been inconsistent, with some companies getting approval to reopen while similar businesses remain shut down. Republican lawmakers have said they've been frustrated by the lack of answers from the Wolf administration about the program. More than 40,000 companies applied for waivers to reopen. The waiver application period ended early this month.

Wolf said in the news media call about one-third of those who applied for waivers were denied. "We actually did this in a way that was meant to be fair and honest," Wolf said. "Were some mistakes made? Maybe," Wolf said. "And if they were, the folks in Pennsylvania have a right to know that." Wolf said the state would be well-served by DePasquale's audit.

Wolf said on the media call that the waiver process was actually designed to be more fair for businesses by giving them a chance to make their case as to why they would be open. The Wolf administration has said it's aiming to be as transparent as possible in responding to businesses and lawmakers while addressing the public health crisis.

The governor was asked about the experience of leading the state government during the coronavirus crisis. Wolf said the state has never experienced anything like this pandemic. Before becoming governor, he helped revive his family's cabinet business that was in bankruptcy. "That seems easy compared to what I'm going through right now," Wolf said. -- [Pennlive](#)

Pennsylvania Republicans considering the state's [new vote-by-mail option](#) are caught in a crossfire of mixed messaging from their party, from President Donald Trump on down. The Grand Old Party's pitch: Mail-in ballots are a good thing for voters, and also perilous for democracy. Trump on April 7 declared them "a very dangerous thing for this country" because of "cheaters" engaged in election fraud. Trump, who has [a long history of making unsubstantiated voter fraud](#) claims, again offered no evidence.

Here in Pennsylvania, the state Republican Party is aggressively pushing mail-in ballots, [offering "vote safe" advice](#) on its website, and hosting online training sessions. The Republican National Committee in April [sent mailers to Pennsylvania voters](#) urging them to vote by mail. Still, Pennsylvania Republican Chairperson Lawrence Tabas pushed the mixed messaging in [a state Senate hearing](#) Thursday, calling mail-in ballots "an important option" while claiming many voters are reluctant to use them "because of an increased risk of fraud."

The Pennsylvania Department of State reports that nearly 675,000 voters had as of Wednesday applied for mail-in or absentee ballots for the primary, including 206,865 Republicans. That is more than six times the request rate in the 2016 primary, when only absentee ballots were available. A Pew Research

Center [poll released Tuesday](#) found that 87% of Democrats support allowing any voter to cast a ballot by mail, while Republicans are split, with 49% in favor and 50% opposed. Two-thirds of the voters in that poll expect November's election to be disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Nancy Patton Mills, chairperson of the state Democratic Party, offered a "simple fix" to the senators. "We should send a physical application for vote-by-mail to every Pennsylvania voter," she testified. "And we should provide return postage for both the application and people's ballots." Trump's campaign, at least, stuck with its message. Erin Perrine, a Trump campaign spokesperson, called full mail-in vote proposals "ripe for fraud." – **Chris Brennan's "Clout"** column in *Philadelphia Daily News*



Stay safe

