

A PRIMER ON BERKS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

A BRIEF VOTER'S GUIDE

Prepared by the League of Women Voters of Berks County

COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA¹

In Pennsylvania, there are 67 counties, each with its own government. County government is made up of a board of commissioners and row officers who are generally elected every four years. Candidates must be registered voters in the County to run for these offices.

This guide is designed to help Berks County voters become more familiar with elected county offices.

ROW OFFICES²

Sheriff

The sheriff performs essential law enforcement functions within the county, including transportation of inmates to and from court, protection of county courthouses, issuance of firearms permits, and serving/execution of bench warrants.

District Attorney

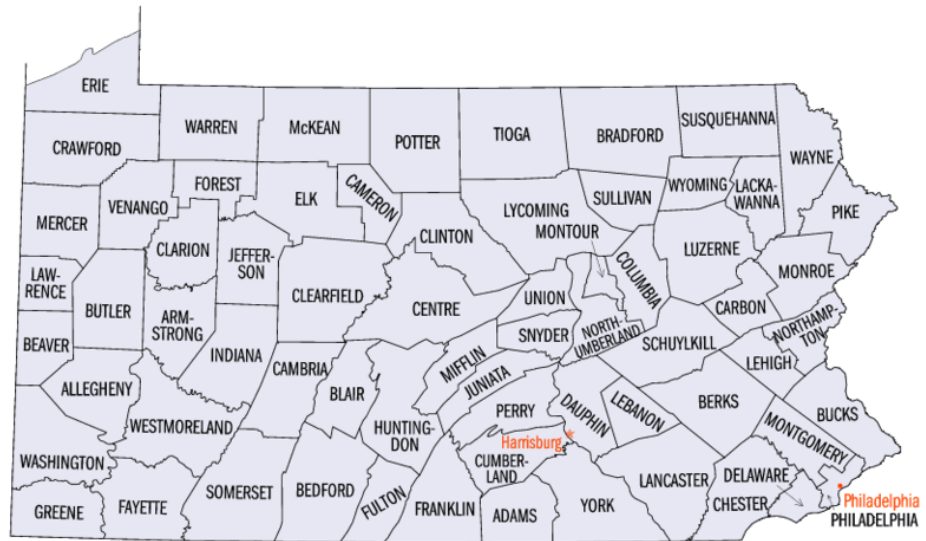
The District Attorney is the chief prosecutor of the county. This office works with local, state, and federal law enforcement to enforce the laws of Pennsylvania and ensure public safety. The DA must be a licensed lawyer.

Treasurer

The county Treasurer collects real estate taxes and fees, invests the county's funds, and assures county cash flow. This office also issues hunting, fishing, motorboat, and dog licenses. S/he also issues licenses for bingo and small games of chance.

Controller

The Controller is the fiscal "watchdog" of the County. S/he is the chief financial officer and auditor of the county and keeps the official ledger and financial records of the county. S/he audits county departments and decides on all bills, claims, and demands against the County.



¹ County government in PA is one of two levels of local government, the other being municipal government.

² Row officers serve as office heads for specific functions. The name may refer to the fact that these offices were traditionally in a row in the courthouse.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Berks County is governed by a three-member Board of Commissioners elected at-large (by the entire county). They are responsible for the legislative and executive functions of the county government. They oversee tax assessment, planning, prison and public safety, election, library, and other county-level departments, as well as devising and approving the county's annual budget and setting the county tax rate. They also serve on the county Prison, Salary, Retirement, and Election boards.

Prothonotary (pro-THON-ah-tary)

The prothonotary is the chief clerk and record-keeper for **civil** matters in the Court of Common Pleas. This office is responsible for filing, recording, and processing civil actions, judgements, tax liens, appeals, passport applications, and family court matters. The prothonotary is also responsible for filing and recording judgements, orders, and decrees of courts and contacting the parties involved with those judgements and decrees.

Clerk of Courts

The clerk of courts is responsible for preparing and maintaining records for **criminal** matters of the Court of Common Pleas. The Clerk of Courts handles court records pertaining to adult, juvenile, and summary cases, and processes bail, assesses fines and costs, records verdicts and sentences, registers constables, and processes appeals to state appeals courts.

Register of Wills/Clerk of the Orphans' Court

In Berks County, this office has dual responsibilities. The Register of Wills maintains records relating to wills and estates. If someone dies without a will, the Register of Wills will appoint someone to administer the estate, if requested. The Clerk of the Orphans' Court is responsible for maintaining marriage licenses, birth and death records, and records involving adoptions, guardianships, and estate litigation.

Recorder of Deeds

The Recorder of Deeds maintains a record of all deeds, mortgages, and real estate transactions that take place in the county, as well as military discharge papers, rights-of-way, easements, and powers-of-attorney documentation.

Coroner

The Coroner investigates and certifies the cause and manner of death for sudden, unexplained, unattended, or violent deaths. The Coroner also verifies the deceased person's identity and notifies his/her next of kin.

BERKS COUNTY ROW OFFICE ELECTIONS FOR 2017

Treasurer: four-year term

Coroner: four-year term

Prothonotary: four-year term

For more information on elections and voting, contact:

Berks County Election Services
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Email: elections@countyofberks.com
Hours: Mon-Fri, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.