

New York City Campaign Finance Board

Post-Election Hearing

Wednesday, February 13, 2014
Voter Education & Engagement:

My name is Mazeda A. Uddin. I am a community leader and activist working to address the challenges facing the South Asian American community in a variety of areas, including education, employment, poverty, worker's rights, Voting Rights, geriatric aid, healthcare, immigration.

We speak of New York City Voters Education in the true context of engaging people from all diversities, faiths, cultures, and nationalities those are in the rise to electorate representation. The NYC Electorate is constantly changing. Asian Americans are now the fastest-growing racial group in this city and newly naturalized citizens greatly benefits from Section 203, the language assistance provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

Throughout the five boroughs, interpreters at poll sites are greatly needed so that voters, with limited English proficiency will be able to cast their votes with minimal cultural impediments and linguistic barriers. Asian Americans is growing segment of the electorate, with a large proportion of first-time voters and foreign-born naturalized U.S. citizens. Nearly four out of five (79%) of Asian Americans polled were foreign-born naturalized U.S. citizens. 10% became citizens within the past 2 years.

Language assistance and bilingual ballots are needed to preserve access to vote in NYC: More than one-third (37%) of Asian American voters polled were limited English proficient (LEP), defined as speaking English "less than very well." One out of five (18%) respondents identified English as their native language. Among the different Asian ethnic groups polled, Korean Americans had the highest concentration of LEP voters, with more than half (67%) identifying themselves as LEP, followed by Vietnamese American (59%), Chinese American (55%), and Bangladeshi American voters (45%).

The Asian American LEP voters need help. They do not know the basic information of election and for this more efforts are needed regarding educating them on these issues in their languages, especially when language assistance is required under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. They need to be educated on how/when to register, who is eligible, when elections are, when primaries are, how to vote, who is running, if interpreters or translated materials are available and whether they can bring someone with them to help them vote.

- The Campaign Finance Board published the NYC Voter Guide. It was translated into Bengali, but had many errors in it.
- Interpreters and translated materials must be provided to LEP voters in Section 203 covered poll sites.
- Even if a poll site is not legally covered under Section 203, the Board should accommodate requests by community based organizations to staff certain poll sites with interpreters.
- All voters should be made aware of the fact that they can be assisted by persons of their choice inside the voting booth, if they cannot read English or otherwise need assistance. Many voters and poll workers do not know this. Voters and poll workers need to be educated on this provision of law (Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act).
- Voters and poll workers need to be educated on when identification is required in order to vote (only first time voters who registered by mail).

We need to reach out to those people male or female who act as the leaders of their communities. These people represent the fabric of New York City. We must use the media, voter registration drives, and education to better energize the existing civic engagement in the community in which we live. Our efforts will be more successful if Colleges, Universities, Community Libraries, Churches, Mosques, Temples, Synagogues, etc., are equipped to have Voter Registration Form and Voter Education Programs.

We need to get connected to one another and to our communities through information sharing and monthly events, such as networking functions, brunches, speaker events, charity fundraisings, summits, panels, and more, with the focus on helping and building strong grassroot leaders who can advance personally and professionally and help the cause. We must mobilize our voters to gather in thousands and we must arrange press conferences, dialogues and round table forums citywide.

They must set goals and objectives for our residents in understanding the importance of voting and engaging our voters in every facet of government. The critical first step toward increasing the civic engagement in the whole voting process of our groups are voter registration, voter turnout and voter education programs.

The Campaign Finance Board must develop methods and other tools to establish partnerships with Community groups to scale-up the reach and efficiency of our every increasing voters in American electorate by gearing up contacts and mobilizing efforts.

AALDEF, and many other partners have observed too many LEP Asian American voters being improperly required to provide ID or even prove citizenship, while other voters are not subjected to these requirements by the same poll workers. This needs to change and must be addressed. LEP voters need to know their rights and what is or isn't required for voting. They were required to prove their U.S. citizenship or their names were missing or had errors in the list of voters at poll sites or they had to vote by provisional ballot. In some cases poll workers even did not know what to do with them. Poll workers were rude or hostile towards the LEP voters. In some poll sites there were no interpreters or translations available when they needed help. Sometime they were directed to the wrong poll site or voting machine/table within a site.

Observation about the existing voter guide:

- The language of the guide is lengthy and complex it needs to be simple and easy for the voters to understand it better. Also there are mistakes in translating the guide.
- The main focus of the guide should be to educate and to engage the immigrant voters in the voting process in an easy and simple manner.
- They need to be educated on how/when to register, who is eligible, when elections are, when primaries are, how to vote, who is running, if interpreters or translated materials are available and whether they can bring someone with them to help them vote, these are the things which should be given top priority in the guide not the candidates profiles.
- A total new guide is needed to fulfill the purpose. Where voter information should be given main focus. And photos and sample ballots can be used to make it easy
- Candidate profiles should not be included in the guide. Profiles can be given as a separate booklet in poll time. This will make the guide handy and useful to the voters.
- The guide should be a 'general guide' to be used in all the elections that are held in USA for all the voters.