

Voters Advisory Assistance Commission Hearing  
Testimony submitted by  
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2016 is the year we learned that there is a war on voters in the US. Every election is a battle, and the Boards of Elections are not on the right side in this war.

I am grateful to be here today from the front lines, as a poll worker, to report on the November 8 Battle of the Bronx, because you, Committee Members, are the ones with the power to negotiate an end to this war.

The skirmishing began in August, when I found out I had been removed from the poll worker list by the Board of Elections. And this when the Board was advertising on the subway for workers, concerned there would not be enough for November.

No doubt I was removed because I chose to speak out about the April 19 primary, at your May 17 hearing and at two BOE Commissioners meetings, and because I wrote a letter to my local paper, the Bronx Times, in which I called out the Democratic Bronx Commissioner for her conduct at these meetings. Thanks to friends on the Democratic State Committee, I was reinstated.

The first salvo in the Battle of the Bronx was fired Friday before the election, when a judge ruled that voters put into 'inactive' status by the Board would be allowed to vote. The catch: they would have to vote by affidavit.

Then, in the early morning darkness of Tuesday November 8, the Battle was on.

At 5:00 am as we arrived, we realized we had just the minimum number of workers for our site. How would we take breaks? Eat lunch and dinner? And why doesn't the Board of Elections require us to confirm we are coming to work, so they know in advance which sites need more workers?

At 5:20 we were still waiting for the police officer to arrive with the keys to the equipment carts and scanners. We have just one hour to check and set up all the equipment, including printing the essential pre-election scanner tapes that confirm the election is programmed correctly. Poll worker friends across the city reported this same unusual delay.

When the officer arrived, we could see through the lobby windows a growing

crowd of voters who have to vote as close to 6 am as possible in order to make it to work on time - many of whom don't know that NY law allows them time off to vote, because nobody tells them.

As voting began, we struggled to detach the ballots from the pads they are bound into. Use thick paper so the ballots won't jam in the scanners? OK, but perforate them sufficiently so poll workers can detach them quickly without ripping the paper.

Once again, ballot design confused voters. Some races had all candidates on one row across, others took up two. Lines to separate races were the same thickness as lines separating candidates and parties.

Why? Because the ballots, printed under lucrative third-party contracts, are designed to be easy for machines and printers, not voters.

Poll workers' choice: Slow the process by explaining ballot layout to voters, or skip it, then have to give voters fresh ballots and void their mistakes.

The worst was the voters who had not voted since the Obama 2008 or 2012 elections, many young and of color. Some had looked up their registrations online. With concern in their eyes, they asked: What does it mean that I am 'inactive'? Can I still vote? Will my vote be counted? In the Election District I worked, 25% of the votes cast, 77 out of 300, 1 out of every 4 voters, voted by affidavit.

Why else is this a problem? Because of the affidavit envelope the voter must fill out. We have to take extra time to check that voters have filled these out correctly, as just one mistake - (many skip the birth date information because it is shaded and hard to see) - can invalidate a legitimate voter's vote.

Voting in an election, which is our right as US citizens, should not feel like going in to battle. It is way past time to end the war on New York City voters.

Thank you.

Diana Finch

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