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From: Diana Finch [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 17, 2016 1:33 PM
To: Voter Assistance
Subject: Fwd: Voter/Poll Worker's testimony for May 17 VAAC Public Hearing: Confusing party enrollment instructions on NY State Voter Registration Form

Resending without attachment, just in case.

I offer testimony as a longtime NY voter and poll worker. Confusing semantics and unclear instructions can be barriers to voting, just as much as onerous voter id practices, and barriers to voting are illegal under state and Federal law.

New York State is among just 11 states that have closed primaries, crucial elections in which voters not enrolled in a party cannot participate.

The NY State Voter Registration Form is both confusing and misleading about party enrollment requirements and needs to be amended immediately so that it is not an obstacle to voting.

The section of concern on the form is: 14. **Political Party** (see attachment below)

The choice of not enrolling in a party should not be included as the last selection in a long list of parties* under the heading 'Political Party.'

Voters can easily skip the Political Party section of the form altogether because they just read the heading and dismiss it because they don't want to enroll in a party. (While it does say under the heading 'Political Party' that 'You must make 1 selection' this could easily be interpreted to mean that you can only enroll in 1 party - not that you must make a selection.

There should be a separate section on the form that is solely for: **Declining Enrollment in a Political Party**

This separate section should include a clear warning that in NY State, declining enrollment in a Political Party means that the un-enrolled voter cannot vote in primary elections - even if they have only ever voted in general elections for the members of a single party.

1) Many people move to NY State and especially NYC from other states that have open primaries and don't understand, may even have never heard of, closed primaries. (This was my experience when I first came to NYC.)

2) A lot of voters confuse 'I vote Democratic' with 'I am enrolled in the Democratic Party.' There are many voters who have voted for years only in general elections, and have always voted for Democrats who sincerely believe that 'voting Democrat' means that

they are Democrats, and means that they are members of the Democratic Party and can vote in the (rarely competitive) primaries. (And the same for voters who always vote Republican.)

Confusing note about Independence Party and voting in primaries:

Finally, because the terms 'independent voter' and 'independents' are widely used by authoritative media sources, elected officials and many others to mean 'unaffiliated voter' or 'voter not enrolled in a political party' the note about a connection between the Independence party and the ability of 'non-enrolled' voters to vote in primaries should not appear as a major instruction under the heading 'Political Party.' It needs to be crystal clear and carefully placed elsewhere on the registration form, perhaps as a footnote under 'Independence Party' - but not under or near any selection for non-enrollment in a party.

Like many others, I believe that this information on the Independence Party and its placement, as well as the party's very name, is designed to lure unsuspecting voters into either membership in the Independence Party, or enrollment as an unaffiliated voter with the mistaken belief they are still allowed to vote in primaries.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Respectfully submitted:

Diana Finch
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*The list of parties itself is confusing:

1. After a long list of parties, the next-to-last selection is 'Other' followed by a blank . This does not follow the format of all the other choices in the list. If it did, it would be: 'Other Party' followed by the blank, or 'Other' blank 'party'
2. The last selection on the list of parties, after Democratic party, Republican party, etc. is 'I do not wish to enroll in a party'
So the voter is being offered the chance to enroll in the 'I do not wish to enroll in a' Party.