

Testimony of Poll Workers
Primary Election
June 23, 2020

The League of Women Voters of The City of New York collected this testimony from poll workers who are members of the LWVNYC.

The issues included the following topics:

1. insufficient protections for workers and voters re: COVID-19
2. Errors in electronic poll books
3. General lack of training for poll workers for both the election and COVID protections
4. Understaffing

Here are the testimonies from our members:

Brooklyn Tech, Brooklyn

Overall, voting went smoothly at our site (Brooklyn Tech) even though we were understaffed by 4 or so poll workers. Throughout the day, turnout was consistent but low, and we had more than enough ballots, pens stickers, voting booths, and scanners. However, we never got plastic face guards (only masks) or plexiglass and though we got gloves, the majority of poll workers didn't wear them, and a few didn't wear masks at all (one voter complained about that fact).

Respectfully submitted,
Spenser Mestal
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In -Tech Academy, The Bronx:

I am a long-time poll worker and I am confident about my knowledge. The poll workers at Early Voting were relatively well trained. The poll workers I worked with on Election Day seemed very somewhat unprepared. Because we were so short staffed, it was not possible to pair them with more experienced workers.

Biggest issue: nearby poll site was unavailable so those voters were sent to my site. My site therefore served twice as many EDs as it serves in a normal election. More privacy booths were set up, which made social distancing more difficult. (This problem might have been solved another way, but wasn't — for example, instead of doubling up sites, the BOE could have rented those large portable hospital tents we've seen used in parks for covid cases, and set them up in parking spaces near the unavailable sites. With open flaps on each end, voters could have moved through the tent in an orderly fashion without having to pass one another at a single entrance.)

We were very understaffed. Normally there are at least two poll workers per ED; on Election Day I was the sole poll worker for two EDs. One person served as site coordinator, translator, and information clerk, and took no lunch despite an 18-hr work day.

Someone came to our site, identified himself to the coordinator (according to her; I did not hear this conversation) as being sent "by the Board to work," and sat down at an ED table. As it turned out, he was not really a poll worker, and eventually he was asked to leave the premises. Later that morning, he was seen standing outside the poll site handing out literature for a specific candidate. The coordinator told me she notified the BOE about this incident.

One scanner (of two) went down twice. Both times, BOE sent tech who arrived within an hour and repaired machines. In both cases, problem was caused by voter trying to insert both pages of ballot at the same time.

Ballot Marking Device (BMD) went down due to paper jam that we could not fix ourselves. This was at 9pm and no other voters needed to use it. Voter who had been using BMD was given another ballot and was eventually able to vote using magnifying lens.

Many people were not listed as registered Democrats in the electronic poll pad. Some insisted they had sent in party registration in time to vote in the primary. Our site had many more affidavit ballots than usual (I've worked at this same site for my years).

One police officer, who was there for two full days, refused to wear a mask. She also did not social distance, and at several times, planted herself right in front of the single entrance to the site (because her cell phone reception was better at the door), meaning that voters could not enter without walking within one foot of her. We had voters in their 90s coming to the site to vote. After the election, I reported her to the Citizen Complaint Review Board.

One elected official came to the site repeatedly, past the "guard rail" (at our site, this would be the Information Table next to the front door), checked the scanner totals and wrote down the numbers. He was thrown out of the site several times by police officers but returned daily nonetheless. One day he entered with a piece of paper saying he was a certified poll watcher (this is illegal as he was on the ballot). On another day his son (who was also on the ballot) came in to vote and also checked the scanner totals; when asked not to approach scanners other than the one he was using, this person told poll workers that "I am automatically a poll watcher because I am on the ballot." There was a great deal of confusion among poll workers and even site coordinators about whether or not a candidate is allowed to "hang out" at a poll site, approach multiple ED tables to greet poll workers, approach the scanners, and read the count of scanned ballots.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Mullen

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Julia Richmond Education Center, Manhattan

I was an information clerk at the polling site located at Julia Richmond Education Center, at East 68th Street. I did not receive a face shield for several hours. . My coordinator had to call BOE to have them delivered. There was a large container of alcohol wipes but no gloves. I never received any written or oral direction for safety protocols. There was no signage to indicate to voters that masks were required. There was a box of masks that I kept on my table to give to voters. This was completely on my own initiative. I only had to instruct one voter to put on a mask. The turnout was low so I did not have serious health concerns. But I had voted early and noticed the early voting site at Wagner Middle School had plexiglass on all the tables. The poll workers handed an alcohol wipe to every voter who entered.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diane Burrows

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Poll Site B0090, Brooklyn

My name is Greyson Brooks, and I am a resident, voter, and veteran poll worker in Brooklyn. For the June 23rd elections, I served as a Table Inspector for ED 066 in AD 52 at poll site B0090. Over the course of the day and night, we encountered many of the usual issues at our poll site, including but not limited to 1) lack of air conditioning, 2) inadequate poll site staffing (including the poll site coordinator having too much managerial responsibility - it's insane that one person is expected to manage a few dozen people while simultaneously doing their own job]), 3) repeat electioneering in front of the poll site by some candidates' campaigns, 4) unprepared poll workers (It's REALLY obvious when a poll worker has not read the training manual. While I believe the Board of Elections generally provides proper information on how to operate a poll site, I do not believe they offer proper training, which is to say: the ways in which they instruct poll workers to do their jobs are in practice insufficient. I am a highly educated analyst and can figure out from the training manual how to do about 95% of my job, but most people, and the majority of poll workers, do not have these skill sets, and therefore require more guidance than the BOE currently provides. One suggestion for improvement is to make the training more goals-oriented and less task-oriented), 5) one of our poll site's two ballot scanners was again inoperable upon opening, 6) many registered Democratic voters listed as not having a party affiliation, as well as 7) an unusually high and unsettling number of voters who were not in the electronic poll book at all despite having voted in the Democratic primaries for years in this ED. In addition, specific to this election, there were further issues, including 8) Democratic voter confusion over the fact that this ballot was two pages, 9) the fact that many of the staff of the facility in which the poll site was located were not wearing masks when in the poll site, and 10) two of my fellow poll workers did not understand how and when to wear masks (one colleague at the next ED table over from me did not wear a mask approximately half the time). But at least we didn't have some issues other poll sites in our borough had, like the one in Crown Heights that only gave one of the two pages of Democrat primary ballots.

Greyson Brooks

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