

Philip Bennett

The following is my statement:

My polling place is P.S. 222 on Bedford Ave. and E. 31st St. I entered the building around 3:30pm.

I asked to use the ballot marking device (BMD).

I sat down and looked at the screen of the BMD, #374938. "Paper jam," it reported. I called for help. Two pole-workers came over and stared at the screen for about two minutes.

"It looks like a paper jam," I told them.

They did not move, continuing to silently stare at the screen. Then a third pole-worker wandered over, poked the machine here and there, lifted a panel and saw a ballot bunched up under it. He pulled it out and the screen took it's proper state, the text asking for an insert.

The pole-workers walked away.

I then tried inserting my ballot into the BMD slot. Something was blocking it. I called again for help. A pole-worker coaxed it in. The screen asked for my input. I quickly voted and pressed the right icons to tell it I was done. Then I heard a crinkling sound. Again I called for help. My ballot was jammed in the BMD tighter than the other but it was finally pulled out without tearing.

Onto the second ballot!

Some more coaxing but we fed it in. It was about 4:00pm.

Around this time I asked if a repair worker for the BMD had been called.

"He's on his way," a pole-worker told me.

I quickly voted and told the BMD I was done.

For the next five minutes the machine seemed to go through a self-diagnostic then it stopped. No crinkling this time. It kept my ballot. The screen read:

"Data error. Failed to calibrate the following scanners: TOP, PV. Please contact an Election Official. A error has occurred."

A pole-worker tried rebooting the BMD (an 11 minute operation). Result: THREE scanners now failed to calibrate! The worker assured me help was coming, then told me none of the workers could call a repair person or even call the Board of Elections, only the supervisor (or whatever they called her) could do that and she was at lunch. So I sat in front of the machine, asking the worker to please reboot it three more times: no difference.

Another worker asked why I don't just use another machine.

"You have another machine?"

"Yeah! Three more! Wanna use them?"

"Are you sure they're BMDs?"

"Uh, they're scanners. But you can use a regular machine, right?"

"You mean a pen and paper? That's not a machine."

"But you can use it, right?"

"I want to use the BMD. It's my right."

Another worker told me the BMD was only for physically disabled people. I corrected him and he did not argue.

It was getting near 6:30, the time I set to surrender. Still no supervisor or repair worker.

Then the obvious occurred to me. I took out my android phone and called the Board of Election. The automatic system listed BMD problems as the first choice. It immediately connected me to a live person. I told her the situation and that the supervisor was still at lunch. She asked to speak with any worker there. I let her speak with the worker who thought a pen and paper was a machine. Another worker took my phone and pulled down her mask to shout into it (So far I'm showing no symptoms of anything).

At around 7pm I got my phone back. Fifteen minutes later the repair worker entered. In a few minutes he extracted my marked ballot. I checked to be sure it was marked accurately and fed it into the scanner. I thanked the BMD repair person, told him I hope we never have to see each other again, and, at around 7:30pm, walked outside into the failing light.

7:30! Six hours to vote!

And I hope I never have to write something like this again. Keep the BMDs repaired, train the workers more adequately and teach them common hygiene!