

Written Testimony
for
The New York State Committee on Elections
ROCHESTER PUBLIC HEARING
AUGUST 5, 2021, 12:00PM
MONROE COUNTY LEGISLATURE
39 W MAIN STREET, ROCHESTER, NY 14614

Submitted By
Sandra Z. Citarella,
Former Democratic Election Inspector Coordinator for the Town of Pittsford
(Resigned 24 February 2021)

Thank you for allowing us to speak about this very important topic: To Review Elections Administration and Voting Rights in Rochester and Western NY.

I have been active in the election process since the late 1980's, working as a poll worker while living in the city of Rochester, and continuing various years as a poll worker (election inspector) and site chair while living in the Town of Pittsford, until 2014 when asked to accept the role of Democratic Election Inspector Coordinator in the Town of Pittsford.

There are a number of topics which I would like to briefly address that directly or indirectly affect the above topic.

New York State's Bi-Partisan Election Structure

We are very fortunate in being one of the few states in this country to have a TRUE Bi-Partisan Election Process. That is, the two major parties in this state, cooperatively supervise and monitor all aspects of elections in New York State, whether they be local, county, state or national elections. This assures that all election laws are beneficial to all parties equally and are executed as such.

Early Voting

The implementation of 10 days of voting before the actual Election Day, has increased the numbers of voters able to vote in-person, and reduces the long lines on that Election Day, whether it be a Primary or General Election. As long as the number and actual voting locations for these early voting days reflect population density in each county.

Mail-in Balloting

Even with the addition of early voting, many voters are not able to physically vote in person. The success and security of mail-in balloting in other states encouraged States like ours to expand the procedure to enable ALL voters the opportunity to use the mail-in ballot without a "just cause" requirement. During this pandemic, it has allowed many voters to safely cast their ballot without risk of exposure. This expanded the ability to

vote to many individuals who would not have been able to do so. We hope that this process continues well into the future.

Election Day: A State (or National) Holiday

Making Election Day a State Holiday adds importance to the Right to Vote. It would also allow many people to work at the polls, who have indicated that they would like to work as a poll worker if they were not required to work for their regular employer. This includes many state, county, and local employees. The need for additional poll workers has increased over these past years and continues to be a problem in many areas.

The 17-Hour Day

In Monroe County, Poll Workers are not allowed to 'share the day'. This means that every poll worker, must work from 5am until 10pm on General Election Days, and some Primary Election Days. Many if not most poll workers are senior citizens. This causes fatigue problems at the most important part of the election day, the closing of the polls. This is the time when most mistakes and problems occur. It is critical to secure the ballots and equipment, and transporting the data to the Board of Elections or, in the case of most towns, transporting the data safely to the Town Clerk in a timely manner.

Effects of Gerrymandering

Our State's Election Districts (Legislative Districts) have been the result of decades of gerrymandering, the purposeful redrawing of district lines to reallocate the majority of certain party members to enhance voting results. This results in one of the most blatant coercions of voting rights. It reduces the importance of one voter's ballot, while increasing to power of another's ballot, depending on their political party registration. It must come to an end, and this is the year to do it!

Procedural Changes in the Monroe County Board of Elections

In previous years, the Commissioners of the Board of Elections have conferred with Election Coordinators, experienced Poll Workers, and Town Clerks when changes in process were being considered, so that experience helped to improve the process and ensured success in its implementation. In the past year, this has not been the case. Changes in procedures were created without any input or consultation with knowledgeable, experienced experts. In fact, many, but not all, of the most experienced employees at the Board of Elections have left their positions.

Training

It is extremely important that Board of Election Trainers are experienced in all areas of the election process. They must have been poll workers, site chairs, and have the hands-on experiences needed to understand the entire process and not just able to read a script. This is not the case in all of the Training staff.

Communication

Much important information is needed to be disseminated in a timely manner before any Election Day. Coordinators need to know who will be working at every polling site. Town Clerks need to have information to create payroll sheets well before Election Day. In January of this year, the Monroe County Board of Elections took over the job of assigning site chairs and poll workers at every polling site (Previously completed by Coordinators in the Towns). This information was delayed (In some cases arriving only the day before Election Day) which created much confusion and delay in processing.

I appreciate the incredible hard work that all the employees at the Board of Elections have done to make our election process secure and focused on the needs of the voter. I hope that, in the future, the Board creates opportunities to obtain the best knowledge they can while improving the voting process for all voters.