

I am Stevie Vargas. I am Chair of the Rochester Chapter of the The Working Families Party, and Co-Founder of Free the People Roc. Beyond that and most importantly I am a community member who relies on a fair and accessible Board of Elections.

I am here to reiterate that an unreliable Board of Election systemically undermines non-traditional candidates who are often women, gender non conforming, young people, and BIPOC folks. We owe it to these candidates to have BOEs motivated by access and not by political gamesmanship. The latter of which we have all experienced and witnessed.

It is important to mention that the major parties and the Board of Elections inherently have an advantage when they are so often staffed by members of the Democratic and Republican committees. Leaving WFP registrants and members at a significant disadvantage by not allowing those who do not subscribe to the two major parties without a seat at the table and allows the two major parties to manipulate who gets on our line.

Intentional staffing and independent appointments of Board of Election Commissioners is critical to ensuring the BOE is treating all candidates and voters of all parties equally.

This year, the BOE decided to reject the Working Families Party's Certificate of Authorization, which kicked our candidates off the WFP ballot line. The commissioners decided this despite the fact that the WFP followed all election laws and BOE rules. It's unfair to hold the WFP and WFP candidates to a non-existent standard and, more importantly, to it's unfair to voters who will not have the choice to vote for their preferred candidates on the ballot line of their choice.

This is why election rules are imperative to improve our democracy and allow constituents to vote for candidates that represent them on a party line that represents them. To not invest in consistent and rules-based decisions for the BOE is to leave behind a significant amount of constituents that are beginning to lose faith in the process and our democracy.

Thank you,

Stevie