

**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on  
Governmental Operations: Assessing the Board of Elections'  
Performance in the 2012 Congressional Primary and  
Preparedness for the Upcoming 2012 New York State  
Primary Election.**

**Wednesday, August 8, 2012**

Good afternoon. My name is Kate Doran. I serve on the Board of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York. As a multi-issue, non-partisan political organization we encourage informed and active citizen participation in government, work to increase understanding of major policy issues, and influence public policy through advocacy and education.

For over 90 years, voter education, voter service, and election administration have been priorities for the League of Women Voters in New York. Accordingly we appreciate this opportunity to comment today.

We acknowledge that the transition from the lever machines was an enormous undertaking and that in many respects the transition is ongoing. But machines and systems are only part of running an election. Today we will emphasize the “people part.” The voter deserves welcoming, knowledgeable, customer service, and poll workers deserve a training program that adequately prepares them for the job. Every voter comes in contact with a poll worker: an Inspector, an Information Clerk, and possibly a Translator. Every poll worker can expect to perform routine procedures, and to face the occasional challenging situation.

Since the Board relies first on County Political Committees to supply poll workers the League devised a grass roots study. We undertook a survey of Democratic and Republican District Leaders regarding their role in recruiting poll workers, and in Election Day oversight. The survey was open from January through March of this year, when we mailed or e-mailed surveys to more than 400 District Leaders. We heard back from an equal number of Democrats and Republicans from all boroughs except Staten Island. 91% of the respondents said that they do recruit poll workers, and 75% of respondents said that they find it difficult to do. The top suggestions from the District Leaders for improving election administration were poll worker related: better training, and ½ day shifts.

We shared our results and analysis with the Commissioners and the Executive Staff who dismissed them because of the 5% response rate, which they characterized as too small to be meaningful.

We encourage the NYC Board of Elections to do its own study and analysis of the reasons for the shrinking pool of prospective poll workers, and to share their results with the City Council and the public.

***Read excerpts from 3 communications rec'd by LWVNYC containing complaints connected to poor voter service on June 26<sup>th</sup>.***

In each instance the voter was alarmed, and sufficiently motivated to write to us. The quoted problems occurred because the poll workers did not know how to do their jobs, or could not give correct answers. Were they lacking the skills? Were they not properly trained and tested?

The League of Women Voters encourages every eligible citizen to register, and come out to vote on Election Day. We believe that poorly trained poll workers, and confusion at poll sites are disincentives to voting. Simply put – poor voter service translates into lower voter turnout.

The current procedure for training poll workers, (mainly Inspectors) in NYC is very costly and of limited value. We question why it has not been revisited along side the new voting system. We suggest a system modeled along the lines of applying for a driver's license in New York. The Board of Elections, without taking on any new personnel, could make available at all times copies of the Poll Worker's Manual. Individuals who want to be Inspectors could pick up hard copies or down load the manual from the Board's website. The Poll Worker Manual and the more recent, *Procedures- Summary Guide* are excellent tools. A motivated reader/learner can essentially teach themselves the job. After studying the manual, the prospective Inspector could come in to a board office and take a written test. The test would be open book, which is as it should be, because test takers are practicing what will be required of them at the poll site: being asked questions and researching answers. If the prospective Inspector completes, and passes the written test, he/she moves to hands-on training on the scanner and BMD, analogous to the would be driver being given a permit to practice driving after passing a written test.

The signature virtue of the Motor Vehicle model, read, study, and test, without classroom instruction is that individuals thinking about being poll workers will self select. The person who does not want to read a manual will not apply. Those who appoint poll workers will likewise have to keep in mind that reading comprehension and communication skills will be tested. Perhaps County Committees will begin to recruit individuals having these particular skills. Hands on training would be less costly because the classes would be much shorter. Training could include role play of challenging situations that arise at poll sites, and be an opportunity for the Board to pass on new information that may not be in the manual, as well as a chance for trainees to ask questions.

It makes sense to couple new training procedures with split shifts on Election Day. Again, we strongly urge the Board to write rules to employ Inspectors to work ½ day shifts. The 2010 Amendment to Section 3-400 of the Election Law gave the Board permission to do this. The low turnout elections in 2011, plus the two low turnout primaries in 2012 would have been ideal times for the Board to stage pilot studies of split shifts. To our great disappointment none were done.

As part of Pre-Election Day duties, Poll Site Coordinators are expected to telephone assigned workers to confirm that they plan to work. This means that Coordinators know in advance whether or not there will be sufficient staff to properly administer the election and to serve the voters. Coordinators should be able to notify the BOE, describe their vacancies and have Standby workers assigned to show up at poll sites at 5:00 AM on Election Day morning.

We urge the NYC Board of Elections, Election Day Operations team, and each of the Borough offices to make changes to the Standby Pool System for the upcoming September 13<sup>th</sup> Primary. We recommend assigning a “Dispatcher,” who would be available to take calls from Poll Site Coordinators on Wednesday before Primary Day, identify appropriate people from the Standby Pool, and assign them to show up at 5:00 AM at specific sites as needed. Currently The Standby Pool cannot be accessed before 6:00 AM, long past time when workers should be onsite preparing for voters.

The League of Women Voters considers informing and educating voters a mainstay of its mission. The Board of Elections complies with requirements of New York State law to notify every registered voter “each year,” by first class mail, in a communication conveying important facts that all voters need. However, election administrators can always do more. Because of redistricting, State Senate, Assembly and Election District numbers have changed. There is no guarantee that voters will hold on to a BOE August mailer for the November General Election. Since this is a presidential election year, we believe it is vital that another “Notice to Voters,” go out in October, and that as much publicity as possible be given to this information. Council members can alert their constituents, and free publicity should be requested from all media outlets.

Going forward we believe that e-mail communication could play a very important role as a less expensive way to deliver important, and perhaps last minute information. It is a great tool for “doing more.” The Board must start to proactively collect e-mail addresses from voters. We suggest that the very next printing of the New York City Voter Registration form include a field for e-mail address. The inclusion could be optional, as the telephone number is now, and voters could be assured that e-mail addresses would not be shared or sold. We believe that voters would welcome targeted, timely information to their Inboxes.

We applaud the staff of the Board of Elections for its hard work during this challenging year. We thank the Governmental Operations Committee for its continuing leadership, and we stand ready to support you both in better serving the voters of the City of New York.