



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

April 19, 2016

Michael J. Ryan
Executive Director
New York City Board of Elections
32 - 42 Broadway
New York, NY 10004

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I am writing to express my deep concern over widespread reports of poll site problems and irregularities as New Yorkers headed to the polls on Primary Day, ranging from faulty ballot scanners and polling locations that opened late (or not at all) to poorly staffed polling sites and voters whose registrations were seemingly purged from the rolls without any effective notification. As I am sure you would agree, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, all New Yorkers deserve an electoral system that is free, fair and efficient—not one riddled with chaos and confusion.

As the City's chief fiscal officer and an elected official with an appointee to the City's Voting Assistance Advisory Committee, it is my job to advise on how the City can expand voting access and improve voting operations, which was the focus of a recent report by my office, "*Barriers to the Ballot: Voting Reform in New York City.*"

As a result of today's reported irregularities, my office will be auditing the management and operations of the Board of Elections in order to identify failings and make recommendations to improve performance going forward. In the meantime, I am asking that you please provide my office with responses to the following concerns that have been raised today by voters attempting to cast their ballots:

- **Poll Site Operations:** From Brooklyn to the Bronx, voters reported arriving at poll sites at the start of the day only to be told their site was not open. The ability of New Yorkers to vote as early as 6 a.m. and as late as 9 p.m. is one of the few virtues of our current system. Voters rightfully expect to cast their ballot within that time range. One voter who reached out to my office reported going to her polling site at the Williamsburg Community Center shortly after 6 a.m. only to be told that the location was not operational and the staff was unable to anticipate when it would be functional. Meanwhile, a voter in Southeast Queens reported broken machines at his poll site at the start of the day, leading poll workers to instruct voters "to place their ballots in a slot, and they would all get processed later."¹ Please provide my office with an explanation as to how you choose poll sites and inform voters of their locations, as well as any plans you have developed to avoid similar problems during upcoming primary elections in June and September, as well as the general election in November.
- **Voter Communication:** As has been reported, some 60,000 voters received notices last month misleadingly stating that the primary election is in September, and neglecting to include the April primary date.² To remedy the mistake, the Board then mailed another letter to the same voters

¹ <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-primary-voters-outraged-broken-machines-late-polls-article-1.2606810>

² http://gothamist.com/2016/03/23/voter_supression.php

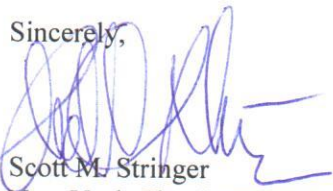


clarifying the dates.³ Please provide my office with an update on planned communications with voters in advance of this year's remaining primary and general elections, as well as a breakdown of costs associated with all mailings to voters in FY 2015 and 2016.

- **Poll Worker Training:** News reports suggest numerous complaints about inadequate staffing and underprepared election workers at poll sites across the city. Given the complexity of the New York City ballot and the 2009 introduction of new, "optimum scan" voting machines, proper staffing at polling places is essential to ensure that all New Yorkers can cast a valid ballot. Voters across the city have complained about poll workers erroneously redirecting them to different poll sites, poll workers unable to operate voting machines, poll workers unable to produce the correct party ballot for an individual voter, and poll workers giving conflicting information. Indeed, one voter contacted my office to report that she was discouraged from filing an affidavit ballot, after being told it would not count towards the election. Please provide my office with copies of all training manuals and other materials provided to poll workers, as well as any future plans to improve training of poll workers.
- **Voter Disenfranchisement:** Of particular concern are numerous allegations of widespread removal of eligible voters from voter-registration rolls, as well as instances of incorrect party affiliations on individual registration records. These errors have conspired to bar first time and longtime voters from exercising their fundamental democratic right. A lawsuit has already been filed, *Campanello et al v. New York State Board of Elections*, which seeks the "immediate restoration" of voting rights for New Yorkers who have been barred from the polls.⁴ Indeed, voter enrollment data shows that the number of eligible Democratic voters in Brooklyn precipitously dropped by more than 120,000 voters between November 2015 and April 2016, without any adequate explanation furnished by the Board of Elections.⁵ The reported decrease in voter registration accounts for a 7 percent drop in registered Brooklyn Democrats according to a WNYC analysis.⁶ Please provide my office with an explanation of how and why these voters were removed from the rolls, and what is being done now to ensure that they are not similarly disenfranchised in the future.

Thank you in advance for your swift attention to these issues. With planned primaries in June and September and this year's General Election for president just a few months away, I am sure you would agree that we owe it to all New Yorkers to address these issues as quickly as possible so as to avoid any recurrence in the future. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call First Deputy Comptroller Alaina Gilligo at 212-669-2571.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/16/nyregion/citys-elections-board-corrects-primary-gaffe-with-another-postcard.html>

⁴ <http://ia801508.us.archive.org/6/items/gov.uscourts.nyed.384188/gov.uscourts.nyed.384188.1.0.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.wnyc.org/story/de-blasio-demands-explanation-boe-drops-126000-brooklyn-democrats/>

⁶ <http://www.wnyc.org/story/democratic-voter-rolls-drop-more-60000-brooklyn-presidential-primary/>