



**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Governmental Operations:**

Evaluating the Board of Elections' Performance in the 2011 Primary Election, and on Resolution, 671 calling for passage of state legislation that would require that paper ballots be designed in a more user-friendly manner
Thursday, September 22, 2011

Good afternoon. My name is Kate Doran and I am the City Affairs Chair of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York. The League of Women Voters is a multi-issue, non-partisan political organization, which encourages informed and active citizen participation in government, works to increase understanding of major policy issues, and influences public policy through advocacy and education.

For 90 years voter education and election administration have been priorities for the League of Women Voters in New York City; therefore we sincerely appreciate this opportunity to comment on the operation of the September 13th Primary.

As a service to voters The League operates a Telephone Information Service. We received fewer calls than usual this year because there were so few contests. Most of our calls were from voters who didn't know if there was an election in which they could participate. Providing them with correct information was more complicated than in past elections because we had to search through multiple Board of Elections lists to respond to each caller. We believe that the implementation of online sample ballots linked to the existing poll site locator will greatly reduce voter confusion and we congratulate the Board of Elections for its commitment to this important innovation. We look forward to this significant enhancement going live in time for the November 8th election.

Some callers complained that the ballot type was too small, which surprised us because there were so few names on most ballots. The small type size was a major complaint in the 2010 elections and must be addressed before the 2012 elections.

Regarding Res. No. 671 – The New York City League certainly supports the Council's Resolution calling for the passage of state legislation requiring that paper ballots be designed in a more user friendly manner. However, at this time I cannot comment on specific state legislation because efforts continue to identify optimum ballot design which we hope will result in passage of a comprehensive bill in the 2012 session.

Since 2006, I have been a poll site coordinator at PS 282 in the 52nd AD in Brooklyn. There are 16 EDs at that site. It is the largest in the 52nd AD.

Coordinators receive, by mail, a package of materials before an election event. Among other things is a Site Coverage Report that lists the names of workers assigned to the site.

As part of Pre-Election Day duties coordinators are expected to telephone the workers to confirm that they are working. This means that we know by Monday whether or not we will have a sufficient number of inspectors to properly administer the election. We urge the Board of Elections to make changes to the Standby Pool system such that coordinators could contact a dispatcher on Monday, describe their vacancies and have standby workers assigned to show up at poll sites at 5:00 AM on Tuesday morning. In the Coordinator's Handbook, on pages 27 and 28 we are told that, "The shortage may be caused by latecomers." And, "After 6:30 AM if you are still shorthanded call your Borough Office and request Standby Inspectors."

The paper ballot optical scan system can run smoothly with fewer employees than the board deployed in the old lever days but the scanners and BMDs take longer to set up and the ED/AD table Inspectors now have more time consuming responsibilities. At PS 282 in Brooklyn, with 16 EDs, we served voters responsibly with 33 poll workers. That was 66% of the 50 that the board assigned. Not all EDs were ready at 6:00 AM because some workers were late, and others lacked skills and/or did not benefit from training. Fortunately, because of the very low voter turnout, the late openings and inadequately trained inspectors did not translate into unacceptable voter service.

We again strongly urge the Board of Elections to act on the March 16th 2010 amendment to the election law, and write rules to employ election inspectors to work half-day shifts.

Those of us who monitor the meetings of the NYC Commissioners have heard concerns that half -day shifts would mean training twice as many workers. That may be so, but training time could be halved inasmuch as early shift workers would be trained in opening procedures, and late shift workers in closing procedures. The training program as presently constituted is of questionable value. Most students never open, much less read the Poll Worker's Manual. They sit in class while a trainer reads to them or paraphrases bits that the BOE deems important. It's long past time to revamp the training, and it makes sense to couple new training procedures with split shifts on Election Day.

Two of New York City's major newspapers recently criticized the Board of Elections specifically for the complex and time consuming closing procedures that delay the announcement of preliminary vote totals. It's worse even than they reported. We don't have calculators. The New York City Board requires hand copying and recording results by Election District. Hence the cutting up of scanner tapes into tiny pieces and clipping them to the hand written "Return of Canvass." They didn't give us clips either. The relevant section of NYS Election Law is ARTICLE 9 TITLE I Section 9-102.

We encourage the Board to embrace the 8-hour work shift; develop a transparent sensible Standby system; and use the scanners to do the things that they can do faster and more accurately than humans: count and record votes.