



*Brooklyn District Leaders Emile Bazile, Shaquana Boykin, Kristina Naplatarski, Julio Peña III, & Jesse Pierce*

New York State Senate  
Standing Committee on Elections  
**Joint Public Testimony**  
**July 28, 2021**

New York State has always been home to some of the greatest and most innovative possibilities. From tenant protections, to climate change; we are leading with courage. It's time we started leading in the way we run our Elections.

First, we would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the poll workers and staff at the Board of Elections; many of whom we have gotten to know over the past 18 months and have dedicated several years to ensuring our elections run smoothly. They have shown up during the pandemic and ensured our elections are run with integrity and we are immensely grateful.

As District Leaders, one of our key responsibilities is to work with the New York City Board of Elections to recruit poll workers and staff poll sites for Early Voting and Election Day. District Leaders do not have a lot of power or influence as a rule, but there is a lot of influence when it comes to the Board of Elections. We have seen first-hand how this poll worker recruitment is used to "pack the poll sites" with friends and family.

In the past two elections we have heard and seen reports of:

- Toxic and inappropriate behavior from poll site coordinators such as harassment, berating, and misinformation in the election process
- Disrespectful and inappropriate behavior from BOE trainers, lack of available trainings and disturbing reports of the state of facilities used for trainings
- A BOE staff member calling us to ask which [Democratic] club we belong to in order to recommend it to a poll worker

We have also witnessed the larger failings of election management including the 2015-16 voter purge of over 100,000 voters, many of them in Brooklyn, the 2018 and 2020 ballot scanner shortage that caused significant lines during early voting, the 2020 absentee ballot mailing fiasco to almost 100,000 Brooklyn voters, and more recently during the 2021 primary, failing to remove over 135,000 test ballots when releasing unofficial election results.

During the COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed a huge surge in public interest to serve neighbors and fellow voters by working the polls for the November 2020 elections. We



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heard over and over again at various poll sites in November about the positive influence of new energy, interest and talent at the polls. We also heard from many of our constituents who received no communication from the Board of Elections after signing up as interested in working the polls. Or who were sent to the holding warehouse area in Sunset Park with little to no communication on what that meant and what to expect. More recently, we witnessed the lack of retention of that November 2020 new poll worker energy for the June 2021 elections, to a distressing degree. As District Leaders, we are provided detailed staffing information of poll sites in our districts. A vast majority of poll site workers who were assigned to work on Election Day by the Board of Elections had either: (1) not taken a 'required' refresher course and/or (2) never confirmed their availability to the Board of Elections. Meaning, the personnel assignments data clearly indicated many of these assigned poll workers for June 22, 2021 Election Day made no positive indications to the BOE that they planned to work. To our knowledge, the leadership at the Board of Elections implemented no mitigation or late stage recruitment plans in order to fill the extensive staffing gaps. This lack of responsibility and preparedness directly and negatively impacts the temporary workforce that are Election Day poll workers. They are forced to come up with solutions and stop gap measures on the day of in order to do the necessary work on Election Day: get the site open on time, make sure people can vote and close the site correctly. We were forced to reach out and recruit untrained poll workers on Election Day in order to pitch in and get some sites to a functional state. A majority of the Election Day poll workers are not Board of Elections staff, they are our friends and neighbors who enjoy the work and performing their civic duty. These Election Day poll workers and New York voters are increasingly not served by the partisan dysfunction that we've come to accept as normal Board of Elections modus operandi.

There are common sense solutions we can implement, both in the short and long term to improve the way we run our elections in NYS:

#### *Short Term*

- Publicly post for positions and conduct national searches for senior level positions.
- More qualified training for BOE staff and poll workers that include real-world examples and common issues at poll-sites.
- Greater transparency in data collection and reporting that includes methodology for public feedback and input.

#### *Long Term*



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- Professionalization of our Elections - civil service positions that are not appointed but merit based.
- A non-partisan Board of Election - removing political appointments out of the process is the single greatest way to remove patronage and corruption.
- Ensuring safeguards and accountability mechanisms are in place to hold senior staff accountable and change practices as needed.

The problems that plague the system are structural; it lies in the archaic ways in which the organization conducts its business, appoints its leaders, and to an extent, appoints election workers. Over our short time as District Leaders, we've witnessed the exciting implementation of progressive voting reforms like Early Voting, expansion of absentee voting and Ranked Choice Voting. We've also continued to witness the Board of Elections's reactive, operational attempts to implement these changes fail and cause incredible stress on the temporary poll worker workforce. It is a relic of Tammany Hall, "Boss Tweed", and a patronage system that we know leads to corruption, inefficient practices and voter suppression. It is also worth saying, we hold the Board of Elections Commissioners and executive leadership, local party bosses and the state legislature directly responsible for the continued failings of the Board of Elections. The accountability for the embarrassment of how NYC and NYS's elections are administered every cycle, sits with the people who hold the power to change how the organization is structured and operates.