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TESTIMONY BEFORE ELECTION COMMITTEE
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We deserve an election administration system that is voter-centric, accountable, transparent, and professional - but we have to be intentional about building it, as it won't happen on its own.

Pollworking is the front line of our democracy. Pollworkers ensure that people can vote and that their vote is - or at least has the possibility of being - counted. Yet pollworking is often an afterthought when it comes to election administration. Pollworkers in this city rarely receive rigorous training nor are they given adequate systems which help them be successful in their vital roles.

Let me start by giving a shoutout to all the pollworkers I worked with this primary season - both during Early Voting and on Election Day - who were committed to helping people vote. They made sure everyone who dropped off their absentee ballot had signed it and voters knew how to put their ballots into the scanner correctly and wait for the message to pop up, "Congratulations! Your vote has been counted." These actions might not sound like much, but they are the difference between a vote being counted and a voter being disenfranchised - these behaviors center voters, not political parties or candidates.

I am so grateful to my team on Election Day - they got to our poll site at 5am and had to stay until 10:30pm - a 17 ½ hour day for which they received barely over minimum wage. But they served voters all day. And what a day it was - I was asked to be the Coordinator of this poll site the afternoon before because the previous Coordinator, who couldn't properly close the poll site in November, so the AD monitors had to do it for and all the pollworkers who worked under her complained to their District Leaders (Democratic AND Republican) that she was terrible, so they told the BOE that this woman cannot be a Coordinator again, yet the BOE staffed her for this position. After I took over, I asked her to do the most basic tasks that every pollworker should know how to do - open the scanner and set up the inspection table - she didn't know how to do either, so I sent her home. Where was the accountability for bad performance? And where was the transparency as to how this person got staffed over the objections of so many people who are responsible for pollworkers?

The reason I even let her stay at the beginning of the day was that I only had ⅓ of the pollworkers present that I should have - there were only 9 of us instead of 26. We started the day with 1 person at every inspector table and at every other role. I had to be a table inspector AND the Coordinator. Other pollworkers would have to jump over to my table to serve voters when I was needed elsewhere to help another pollworker or voter, but then had to jump back to their table when voters were in line there - it was chaotic and confusing for voters.

I asked the BOE repeatedly - as did the AD monitors - for more pollworkers for my site. They only sent one person to coach me about being the Coordinator who was great, but he could only stay a few hours. They never sent any other pollworkers. We were so short-staffed in the morning, it was not possible for anyone to take a break. I had to get help from the community - I asked Brooklyn Voters Alliance members and Gowanus Mutual Aid for help. And folks came - I got at least 5 people who we trained on the spot and who were open to helping, professional, and badly needed.

I also need to mention that the passwords I was given for the tablets - the Information Clerk/Coordinator and the ePollbooks were wrong. Luckily, I got the correct one for the ePollbooks through my District Leader (NOT the BOE), so we could open on time. But I didn't get the correct one for the Information Clerk until mid-day - he had to use the paper address lookup prior to that. And the tablet I was supposed to use as the Coordinator was never reset from the November election, so it was useless.

We shouldn't have to live with these problems every election - we keep doing the same things, but expecting different outcomes (isn't that the definition of insanity?). We need to shift our framework and the system itself. Here are some lessons learned:

- Update pollworker training and standards
- Redesign Election Day poll site staffing and procedures to more closely resemble Early Voting - use ballot-on-demand so less pollworkers can handle more EDs effectively
- Make the BOE use split shifts, so more people can be pollworkers - including high school and college students
- Let pollworkers of every affiliation be staffed for every needed function, not just in a crisis
- Mandate - through legislation - transparency and accountability from the BOE

Democracy takes work and we have ours cut out for us. Thank you.