

FLORIDA

PROGRAM

On Election Day in Florida, Election Protection deployed over 200 legal volunteers, spread across Miami-Dade, Broward, Hillsborough, Orange and Leon Counties supported by a Hotline call center in Miami.

Significant election problems in Florida included incredibly long lines, absentee ballot difficulties, poorly trained poll workers, and inadequate election information.

BEFORE ELECTION DAY

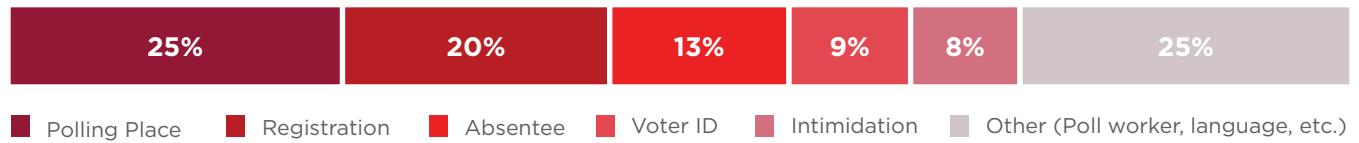
In 2011, Florida passed HB 1355, a law which (1) shortened early voting days, (2) created extra steps for voters who moved to new counties and (3) limited third party voter registration. Also, a federal court in Florida blocked the state's restrictions on community-based voter registration, holding that the restrictions were unconstitutional.

In May of 2012, election officials in Florida attempted to purge voters from the voting rolls based on faulty data matches that incorrectly labeled eligible American citizens as non-citizens. Election Protection Coalition partners and county election supervisors sought to end the removal process via litigation. After the incorrect purges came to light, the majority of Florida Supervisors of Elections refused to continue them.

In October of 2012, there were reports of calls being made to voters in Florida telling them they could vote by phone. Callers told voters that "the Supervisor of Elections authorized us to take your vote by phone." The callers had the voters' names, addresses, and party affiliations, and said that they only needed a few more pieces of information to accept the recipients' votes. In response, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), an Election Protection Coalition partner, conducted robocalls to voters in Florida, which included the 1-866-OUR-VOTE Hotline number, in order to properly educate voters about voting procedures.

During early voting in Miami-Dade County, many voters waited in line at the North Miami Library for over eight hours on the Saturday before Election Day. Election Protection

2012 VOTING PROBLEMS IN FLORIDA



attempted to resolve this crisis by repeatedly requesting that Governor Rick Scott issue an executive order extending early voting to include the Sunday before Election Day. Unfortunately, the repeated appeals were denied. On the last day of early voting, voters at one North Miami voting site had to wait until 1:00 a.m. to cast their ballots. In response, the Miami-Dade Supervisor of Elections allowed voters to cast in-person absentee ballots on Sunday. However, shortly after voting began, the staff became overwhelmed by the number of voters and shut down the polling location. The hundreds of voters waiting outside protested, and the Supervisor eventually reopened the office for voting.

ELECTION DAY

Long Lines

On Election Day, Floridians continued to face long lines, with the longest lines occurring in Orange Miami-Dade and Broward counties. In Miami-Dade County, as during early voting, voters had to wait in line until 1:00 a.m. to cast their ballots. In Orlando, at the Lake Nona YMCA precinct, over 100 determined voters were still waiting in line at 9:30 p.m.

In Broward County, many voters waited for long hours. In particular, Tarmac and Weston voters had to wait until 10:00 p.m. before being able to vote. In Miramar, the long lines worsened when precinct 27 ran out of paper ballots. Unfortunately, new ballots did not arrive until almost 7:00 p.m.

Challenges Faced by Voters with Disabilities

During early voting and on Election Day, Election Protection received numerous calls from voters with disabilities who were unable to stand in long lines, with many stating that they asked for help from poll workers, only to be told nothing could be done for them.

For example, a diabetic voter in Orlando recovering from recent foot surgery was denied a chair to sit on, while she waited in line, because the polling location did not have any extra chairs to provide. The diabetic voter would ultimately stand in line, unaided, for three and a half hours. A disabled voter in Miami-Dade, unable to stand for long periods of time, was also

denied a place to sit down, after being told that the polling location lacked sufficient space for him. The voter was simply told to come back later. He did, but it took two additional and unnecessary trips for the voter to cast his ballot. In both cases, Election Protection called election officials about these incidents. However, Election Protection was told that due to the decrease in early voting locations, voting officials were simply overwhelmed by early voter turnout, and they could not accommodate these seemingly modest requests.

Absentee Ballot Problems

In Palm Beach County, a printing error forced the county to hand-copy 35,000 returned absentee ballots so they could be counted. When the county realized there was a problem, they stopped sending out the remaining absentee ballots but failed to notify the voters who were waiting to receive them. In Broward County, numerous voters reported a failure to receive requested absentee ballots. One voter stated that she contacted the county about this problem and was told that “it was a good thing [she] called, otherwise [she] never would have received a ballot.” Voters who failed to receive their absentee ballots faced the prospect of having to cast provisional ballots on Election Day.

However, the biggest problem may have been encountered by voters who received and voted their absentee ballot, only to have it rejected. In Florida, in order for an absentee ballot to count, the voter’s signature on the ballot must match the signature on file with their voter registration. If it does not match, the ballot will be rejected. Throughout the year, Election Protection worked with state partners to increase voter awareness regarding the signature match requirement, and to urge voters to update their signature. Despite these efforts, Election Protection received numerous calls from voters who received absentee ballot rejection letters due to the signature match requirement. It is estimated that one to three percent of all Floridian absentee ballots were rejected due to this issue.

Problems Related to Voters Moving from One County to Another

Poll workers were confused over new requirements related to voters moving from one county to another. Voters who moved to a new county and failed to update their address were required to vote provisional ballots. This change did not impact voters who moved within their county. Across the state, voters who moved within their county were told by poll workers that they were required to vote by provisional ballot. In response, Election Protection contacted County Supervisors of Elections, with mixed results. In some instances, poll workers were given revised instructions, while in other cases, the results were not clear.

Polling Place Confusion

Voters also faced confusion when they voted in polling locations that housed more than one precinct, as well as when dealing with recent polling location address changes. In Hillsborough, voters arrived at a single polling location housing three distinct precincts and often did not know which precinct line to stand in. To make matters worse, this location provided voters with only three computers to verify precinct numbers. The computers were older models which ran slowly and broke down frequently. If a voter waited in an incorrect precinct line at this location, poll workers were supposed to direct them to the correct precinct. However, because of computer and phone problems at the Hillsborough Supervisor's office, they were unable to do so.

A young voter, accompanied by his grandparents, went to his polling location, which housed machines for multiple precincts. The voter saw a sign that seemed to direct him to a different polling location. When the family arrived at the new polling location, they did not appear on the registration rolls and were given provisional ballots. When he left the polling location, he spoke with an Election Protection volunteer, who determined, by using the Election Protection App, that the original polling location was indeed the correct site. The sign was only supposed to direct voters from one of the precincts at the original polling location to the new polling location. The voter reported that at least ten other voters had encountered the same problem.

Election Protection volunteers spoke to the Hillsborough Supervisor of Elections' office about the problems with voters in the wrong polling location. The office asked Election Protection volunteers to encourage voters to use the Election Protection App, in order to make sure they were in the right polling location. The App helped to ease the burden on poll workers, saving valuable time and shortening lines.