

# MINNESOTA

## PROGRAM

Minnesota voters were aided by a team of more than 300 Election Protection volunteers, including field program volunteers who covered precincts in 19 Minnesota cities, and close to 100 Hotline volunteers who staffed a call center from October 8th through Election Day. Minnesota voters relied on the field program and Hotline to aid in locating their precincts, address same-day voter registration issues and report problems occurring at the polling sites. Due to Superstorm Sandy, the Minnesota Hotline team also covered calls for Missouri on Election Day and the day before Election Day.

The most common problem reported related to instructions being given by poll workers to voters with respect to the two ballot initiatives (Voter identification and Marriage Amendment); reports of this issue were received from precincts in at least 13 cities throughout the state. Minnesota voters also reported long lines at polling locations, particularly in Minneapolis. Finally, there were a handful of incidents involving improper procedures with respect to same day voter registration and language assistance.

## ELECTION DAY

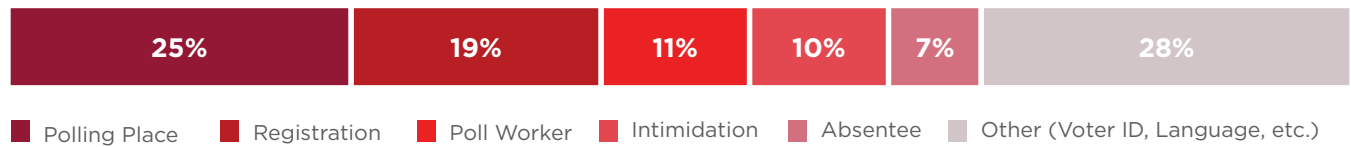
### *Poll Worker Problems*

One recurring report concerned instructions being given by poll workers regarding ballot measures. Callers from at least 13 different cities reported that poll workers were instructing voters that leaving the ballot measures blank would automatically result in a 'no' vote. For many voters, these instructions raised an issue of poll workers improperly influencing the outcome of the election. There was even a report of posters on the wall with the instruction "a blank vote is equivalent to a no vote" put up in Washington County polling places. In response to these reports, Election Protection contacted county and city election officials, who uniformly stated that poll workers were advised not to make such statements, and were responsive about directing the specific poll workers to stop such instructions.

In some of the reports, the problems appeared to indicate the inadequate training of poll workers. For example, some elderly Hmong voters were asked to provide identification,

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## 2012 VOTING PROBLEMS IN MINNESOTA



while a white person in line directly behind the Hmong voters who was getting out identification was told not to worry about providing it. A handful of other reports indicated that poll workers were rejecting identification for same day registration that was valid under law. In those cases, Election Protection volunteers were able to intervene and provide the voters with information that enabled the voters to overcome the issue (e.g., references to the Election Judge Manual). Additionally, there was at least one report in Minneapolis that people accompanying voters into the voting booth for purposes of providing language assistance were only permitted to help three voters. This limit applies to individuals assisting voters mark a ballot, however, and does not appear to apply to general language assistance. Election Protection contacted county election officials and ensured that language assistance could be provided to voters who required such help. Election Protection Minnesota intends to seek an advisory opinion from the Minnesota Attorney General regarding the scope of permitted assistance to avoid confusion in future elections.

### *Overburdened and Disorganized Polling Places*

There were multiple reports of overburdened polling places, particularly in Minneapolis, where voters at several polling places experienced waits in excess of two hours. This was likely due to redistricting, which reduced the number of polling places and made it difficult to predict accurately voter turnout at the overburdened locations. In a few precincts, this may have also been the result of how same-day registration was handled, or the result of malfunctioning machines. With over 17% of Minnesota voters registering on Election Day, it is imperative that poll workers have proper training for managing this volume. Minneapolis has already publicly announced an inquiry and is committed to addressing these issues for the next election.

In addition, there were also several reports of general disorganization at polling places throughout Minnesota. Some voters were required to cast ballots in overflow areas without privacy, such as at the Lutheran Church polling location in Mankato. Other voters observed unattended tables for poll workers and forms with personal information left out for everyone

to observe without any safeguards, such as at the Waite Park School polling location in Minneapolis.

#### *Far-Flung Effects of Superstorm Sandy*

Although located in the Midwest, seemingly far from much of the damage wrought by Superstorm Sandy, some Minnesotans were nevertheless impacted by the storm. One Minnesota voter was held up at Heathrow Airport in England due to the storm, and was unable to return to the state in time to cast a ballot. Another voter had a record of mailing her absentee ballot, but was advised that the plane carrying it was delayed due to Superstorm Sandy. Election Protection officials contacted the Secretary of State's office on behalf of these voters in an attempt to figure out an emergency method of voting for the stranded caller. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State's office and the Governor's office had not been delegated authority by the legislature to help such individuals in emergency circumstances. While Minnesota election officials empathized, nothing could be done under current law to make sure this stranded traveler could cast a ballot, or to ensure that the delayed ballot would be counted. This emergency authority is something that the Secretary of State has asked for from the Minnesota Legislature in the past. To make sure all voters can exercise their rights in the case of emergencies such as Hurricane Sandy, such emergency authority certainly merits further consideration by lawmakers.