

Voters First Advisory Commission

Public Hearing

Monday, June 4, 2007

CCRI –Flanagan Campus, Room 2706 – Lincoln, RI

Commission Members Present:

Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis

State Sen. Juan Pichardo

State Rep. Jon Brien

State Rep. Joseph Almeida

Ken McGill, Pawtucket Board of Canvassers

Bob Kando, Director, RI Board of Elections

Jan Ruggiero, Director, Secretary of State's Elections Division

Staff Members Present:

Paul Caranci, Deputy Secretary of State

Mark Welch, Esq.

Pam Lombardi, Administrative Assistant

Chris Barnett, Communications Director

Bob Graziano

Rob Rock

General Public Present:

42 people in attendance

Summary of Hearing:

Chairman Mollis opened the hearing by explaining the purpose of the hearing, outlining the 10-point reform program, introducing the Commissioners, announcing the dates and locations of the remaining hearings and explaining how to reach the Commission with comments. Comments emailed to votersfirst@sec.state.ri.us will go to Deputy Secretary Caranci. Definitive comments would be most helpful. The members' goals are to "hear" from the public, not debate issues. Rep. Brien provided a brief explanation of the number of states with a photo ID program and distributed information relative to the Indiana Circuit Court of Appeals decision on Photo ID, a list of state voter ID programs currently in place, and a summary of Indiana's Photo ID basics.

Public Comment:

Chris Young – Former candidate for U.S. Senate and Mayor of Providence

- As a candidate for public office he witnessed voter fraud on several occasions.**
- In 2002, attorney Kevin McKenna attempted to remove 35,000 names from the voter rolls after a mailing from the Providence Board of Canvassers was returned. (this information is posted on his website – wheretovote.com) RI is now in violation of federal election law by not removing these names after 2 consecutive federal elections.**
- The Secretary of State found another 72,000 names on the state voter list that had notifications returned. These names also need to be removed from the list.**

- Election fraud and election fixing seem to be common practice in Rhode Island.
- The lottery for determining the placement of names on the ballot is also fixed. Certain balls are weighted. In his own election, he examined the balls and found evidence of tampering and was not allowed to have the number associated with his name changed.
- Photo ID may not pass constitutional muster. Preferred system would be to photograph everyone entering the polling place to vote and then compare number of photographs with number of signatures and number of votes cast.
- The recount system is corrupt because it forces a person to give up his right to challenge the election in court. Recounts never change the vote totals and the system needs to be fixed.
- Judge recently ruled that ballots couldn't be viewed by the public. This should be changed.

Terry Gorman, Executive Director of RI for Immigration Law Enforcement -

- Majority of Rhode Islanders favor election reform.
- Should work with funeral directors to clean up voter rolls.
- New people in neighborhoods can help to get voters registered.
- Photo ID is a good thing, but also need to check citizenship before allowing someone to vote.
- Last year he testified before the Board of Elections and another person testified that over 600 votes were tampered with. A woman named Laura testified that she witnessed illegal aliens voting. Both

events occurred in Ward 8 of Providence. He witnessed people bussed in by Casino advocates being taught how to vote for straight Democrat ticket.

Christopher Emery -

- Questioned the manner in which the hearing was promoted to people with vision and hearing impairments.

Secretary Mollis responded that meeting notices were mailed to organizations that serve persons with disabilities as well as posted as required by state law. The notices included an invitation to the public to request disability-related accommodations. No requests were received.

Edward J. Slattery -

- Favors photo ID.
- Confirmed that casino proponents bussed many people to the polls, but not sure if there was fraud.
- No one ever asks at the polls if a voter is a citizen even though it's a requirement to vote.

Rene Bobola -

- He speaks to veterans at VA hospital. 40-60% oppose weekend voting. Want to vote on Tuesday like they always did. After working all week, they shouldn't have to go out on the weekend and vote. It's a time for the family.

- Polls should close at 8:00 P.M. This will allow workers to pack up equipment and material and return it to town hall. Only 7-8 voters go out between 8 and 9.**
- People should have to speak English to vote or take an interpreter with them to the polls. He sent people home who couldn't understand English and told them to come back with an interpreter.**
- Believes there is sufficient privacy at the polls. Only way to increase it is to have separate rooms.**

Laura Resfield, Pawtucket poll worker -

- Voting machine for the disabled was difficult to use. Should keep a machine at City Hall for 30 days prior to the election for people to practice on.**
- More training sessions for poll workers.**

Ken Postle, Sr. -

- Favors a strict photo ID program.**
- Need to clean up the voter rolls.**

Irene Mecchi, Pawtucket poll worker -

- Strongly favors photo ID program.**
- While working at the poll, a woman gave her an ID. She had never asked for an ID, the woman just gave it to her. The photo clearly wasn't of the woman who was trying to vote. She spoke with her poll supervisor who instructed her not to allow the person to vote without presenting a copy of a utility bill. The voter left and returned a few**

moments later with an attorney who represented one of the candidates. The attorney spoke to the supervisor and the woman was allowed to vote.

- Conditions at the polling places are not good. Firemen were making poll workers go outside the poll to use a restroom.

Dorothy O’Gara -

- Agrees that funeral directors could help remove deceased people from the voter rolls.

- The new sign-in sheets are problematic. We should return to the old ones.

- New voter registration requires no verification of citizenship. This should change.

- Every polling place should have a telephone available inside.

Peter S. Mecchi, Pawtucket poll worker -

- Restrooms outside are cold and it’s too dark to require poll workers to go out.

- Need better worker training on the new equipment. Should train only 10-15 people at a time.

- Everyone should present an ID or birth certificate before voting.

- Proof of citizenship

- Polling places are in bad shape.

- 50-foot rule should be expanded. Too many people bothering voters.

- Absentee ballots shouldn’t be so hard to get.

- Every polling place needs to get proper equipment.

Elizabeth Williamson, Pawtucket poll worker -

- Should eliminate straight party ticket.**
- Believes in photo ID. Citizenship should also be proven.**
- At end of night, all material should go into one bin and be sorted later. This will allow for easier closing and fewer mistakes.**
- Why can't we hire a part time person (or volunteer) to clean up voter rolls?**
- Allow poll workers time to leave poll to vote rather than voting by absentee.**
- Massachusetts no longer requires a disaffiliation form. Should remain as you entered poll.**

Judith Bynum, Pawtucket poll worker -

- When polls close there is a lot of rushing to get everything back to city hall. Mistakes are made in the rush. Closing polls at 8:00 P.M. would be helpful.**
- Training needs to be more intense. Instructors rush through it.**
- New machine for handicap voting is hard to use. Should allow it to remain at city hall for a while for training.**
- Hard to explain voting process to people who don't speak English.**
- All ballots should be in English only, no Spanish. Citizens should be able to speak English.**

Fredericka Athanas, National Federation of the Blind -

- AutoMark machines didn't work. Some people were denied use of**

them. Poll workers didn't know how to use them. Need better training.

Blind people need to be told that there is more than one ballot.

- She got a CD-ROM ("EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT VOTING") with election facts on it. Make it available to the public. This should be sent to all Civics' teachers.**

- Referenda should be on a separate CD so you don't have to listen to 3 hours before hearing about them.**

Kevin Boswell -

- AutoMark is great idea but it doesn't work well. A non-handicapped person should be able to use it, but he witnessed where they were denied use.**

Roxanne Menard -

- Language is barrier when entering new country, but people must learn it. She had to learn when she came from Canada.**

- City Clerk can provide death certificates to help clean up voter rolls.**

Dorothy Weincis, Pawtucket poll worker -

- Days are long for poll workers. Booths should be set up by someone else to help the process of setting up.**

- Need more training for poll workers**

- Juniors or seniors in high school should be used at polls because they are better with technology. They can understand AutoMark better.**

- Viewing ballots by public should be allowed.**

Chairman Mollis gave closing remarks. Assured public the purpose of the hearings is to “listen” to voters. The Commission is aware of many of the issues discussed and is making strides to improve and remove any barriers to make voting eligibility easier. Also noted that “weekend voting” refers to an additional days to vote, not eliminating Tuesday as Election Day.

Secretary Mollis adjourned the hearing at 8:40 P.M.

A Commission Workshop was scheduled for Wednesday, June 13, 2007 at 2:30 P.M. at the State House. Room 203