

Short and sweet-

I have been an election judge for the last 7 years. Each time requires another 3-hour training class. In the past most classes were not adequate preparation for the day.

Last Spring, the Election Board took over the training responsibility after several years of UB being contracted out to run trainings. The Spring Judge training was very similar to previous by UB. But this fall after numerous problems in the primaries, they pivoted and completely reworked the training. I was in a class of all returning Judges. We all agreed it was best taring ever.

I feel confident that with this new training, everything should run smoothly. Of course, I think the best long-term solution is voting centers rather than precinct level polling places. My essay on that below.

#### An argument for Voting Centers

Our voting system in Maryland and especially in Baltimore City needs to modernize to better meet our residents needs and be more cost effective.

For many years voting was done in person, on a Tuesday, at a neighborhood precinct location. These are usually libraries or schools. Originally, they were primarily walk-to locations but in recent years more people drive as they are on their way to or from somewhere. The only exception to voting in person at your own precinct was by getting an absentee ballot ahead of time. This involves a cumbersome application process.

In recent years there have been a few improvements in voting access offered. About 12 years ago early voting became available in Maryland. We have early voting at 8 locations around Baltimore City, available weekdays, and weekends. Beginning two years ago, Maryland permitted same day voter registration further improving access for voters.

COVID-19 brought us additional options. Maryland quickly developed a rigorous mail-in and drop-off box option in 2020. This helped many people feel comfortable voting without being exposed to a virus. COVID-19 also introduced us to Voting Centers for the November 2020 election instead of precinct level voting. This was done primarily because it required fewer election judges who were hard to find and train during the height of the pandemic. There were 24 locations around the city open election day where any resident could vote at any center.

I have served as an election judge at a voting center election day 2020, the new system worked very well, and voters seemed satisfied. There were many fewer provisional voters because voters could vote anywhere in the city as opposed to just their home precinct. The facilities were larger than the old precincts. I was in a high school gym on the eastside. The site had bus access, bike racks and a good size parking lot. We had voters from the immediate area, voters who worked or attended school near the site all come to vote. When the voter checked in, a

ballot number was given based on their address and then they were given the proper ballot for their location.

Unfortunately for primary 2022, now scheduled for July 19, 2022, we are stepping back words by going back to the precinct system. This costs more and is very challenging to staff. It requires many more election judges and a huge expense of moving all the equipment from the early voting locations to the precincts.

Consideration should be given to a new system moving forward based on what worked in 2020 with a few improvements. Maryland should look at combining early voting and voting centers. Baltimore City for example could have 20 or so centers spread throughout the city that would open ten days before the 'Tuesday election day' and end on election day. This way equipment is only set up once. Any resident could vote at any location in the city. The centers would have user friendly hours, some early mornings, some late evenings, and weekends. Election judges could work the entire ten days or some partial schedule. This system would require fewer judges but also may offer employment to potential judges who may only be available weekends or evenings. Set up the machines once and election judges could have shifts if needed.

Of course, in addition to the Voting Centers, Maryland would keep all the mail-in and drop box options, which worked for so many voters. Currently there are 200 + precincts in Baltimore City and on election day they each have a minimum of 6 trained election judges. Each judge is currently paid \$200 per day and the two chief judges at each precinct are paid more. Certainly, it is pleasant to chat with my neighbors on election day as happens in the precincts, but it is time for Maryland to move forward with a cost-effective way for the greatest number of people to vote.

If it is too late to adopt this system for 2022, this election will likely show the state how cumbersome and unnecessary the precinct system is. Given the summer date, many voters will take advantage of the mail-in and drop box locations they got used to last election and early voting, leading to an extremely slow day at the precincts. Meanwhile we will have fully staffed and expensive to run precinct voting on election day. Hopefully the State officials will observe carefully and be open to future changes that lead to a more effective system in 2024.