

Democracy North Carolina

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Forsyth County Failures Disenfranchise Voters

WHAT HAPPENED: Forsyth County Board of Elections' staff director Tim Tsujii says that the cover slip for provisional ballots lacked a designated area for a voter's signature and many voters were not instructed by poll workers to add a signature somewhere on the form. Despite this combination of technical and poll worker error, the 3-member Board of Elections decided last month to throw out more than 130 provisional ballots, coding them "no signature."

WHAT'S NEXT: The State Board of Elections is ordering some counties to "re-canvass" or reevaluate their rejection of some ballots. Democracy North Carolina says that should happen in Forsyth County. "The voters did everything they were told to do. Their voice is being silenced through no fault of their own," said Bob Hall, executive director of Democracy NC.

"Forsyth County has serious problems with insufficient and poorly trained poll workers, inadequate equipment, and poor planning that reflects a lack of respect for voters." He pointed out that Forsyth was the only large county that refused to open Early Voting locations on the first Saturday, creating more stress on Election Day. Broken machines and inadequate in-take stations caused long lines; and poor training and preparation led to voters getting the wrong ballots in some precincts and having their ballots denied due to "no signature."

"We hope the new elections director can turn things around, but he needs help from all three members of the county board of elections," said Hall

WHO IS AFFECTED: Hall said all voters are affected by inadequate planning, staffing and equipment. But the impact hits some voters harder.

- African American and Latino voters are 30% of the county's registered voters, but they make up 61% of the 130 voters whose ballots were rejected because of "no signature."

- Statewide, about 40,000 provisional ballots were cast and nearly 60% counted. However, only 33% of the 962 provisional ballots in Forsyth County were counted. Examples of voters affected:

Nathan Gatto: 336-416-3182. He left and came back because of the long lines; waited the second time in line one and half hours. His wife left without voting to get back to attend their small business. "It's disturbing to learn that my vote was not counted after all that trouble."

Phoinece Green: 336-784-8020. She runs a daycare and thought her registration was updated when she updated her driver's license. "It's not right that my vote wouldn't count."

Alex Nelson: 336-512-6928. He's a student at the School of the Arts. He went twice to vote because of long lines. "It's disheartening to learn my ballot was denied. Even though my candidate lost, I want to be part of the process and have my voice heard."

Latoya Spencer: 804-255-3175. She's a school teacher who thought her registration would be updated when she changed her driver's license. "I think my vote should count, it's not right."

Amber Dalholt: 336-813-9696. She says "the whole process was very frustrating. It needs to be fixed for the next election so it doesn't happen to more voters."

MEDIA FOLLOW-UP: > http://www.journalnow.com/news/elections/activists-voters-faced-challenges-because-of-n-c-photo-id/article_eb1ff6d0-5de4-5304-a612-001af3fda005.html

> http://www.journalnow.com/news/local/elections-director-addresses-concerns-outlines-changes/article_8b08c1e5-1963-5d37-a0d6-300cce3e155c.html