
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON BALLOT DESIGN

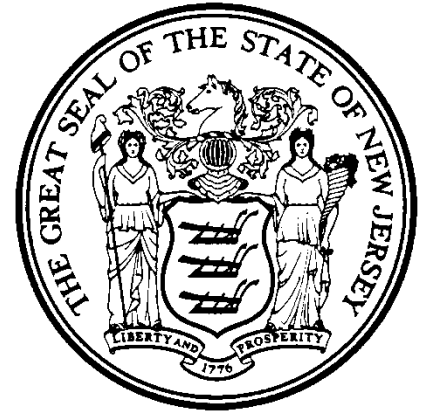
“The Committee will take oral testimony from members of the public on the design of ballots to be used in primary and general elections in this State”

LOCATION: Agile Strategy Lab
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Newark, New Jersey

DATE: November 12, 2024
6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Al Barlas, Co-Chair
Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Vice Chair
Assemblyman Michael Inganamort
Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis
Assemblyman Antwan L. McClellan
Assemblywoman Ellen J. Park
Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin
Assemblyman Gabriel Rodriguez
Assemblyman Gerry Scharfenberger



ALSO PRESENT:

Ryan Brinkerhoff
Mary Lawlor
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aides*

Sarah Ballentine
Andrew McAllister
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aides*

Diego Romero
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aide*

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

Al Barlas
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Co-Chairs

Verlina Reynolds-Jackson
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Co-Vice Chairs

Dan Hutchison
Michael Inganamort
Michele Matsikoudis
Antwan L. McClellan
Ellen J. Park
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NEW JERSEY STATE LEGISLATURE

ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON BALLOT DESIGN

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COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON BALLOT DESIGN

FROM: ASSEMBLYMEN BARLAS AND WIMBERLY, CO-CHAIRMEN

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - NOVEMBER 12, 2024

The public may address comments and questions to Ryan Brinkerhoff, Mary Lawlor, Committee Aides, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Sophie Love, Secretary, at (609)847-3890 or email: OLSAideABD@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Assembly Select Committee on Ballot Design will meet on Tuesday, November 12, 2024 at 6:00 PM at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Agile Strategy Lab – Room L70, Central King Building, 355 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Newark, New Jersey, 07102.

Parking is available at the NJIT Summit Garage Parking Deck located at 154 Summit Street, Newark.

The committee will take oral testimony from members of the public on the design of ballots to be used in primary and general elections in this State.

Issued 11/7/24

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ASSEMBLYMAN BENJIE E. WIMBERLY (Co-Chair): So, good evening.

I am Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly; I am the Co-Chair of the Ballot Committee, along with Co-Chair Barlas -- Assemblyman Barlas.

This is our third hearing, and we are looking forward to a fourth one. And, we just want to make it perfectly clear we are still working on a location. It will be next Monday. Next Monday, November 18, and it will be a location in the south. So, we are working on it. There are issues with livestreaming capabilities with two of the locations that we reached out to. And, we will have that up for you as soon as we secure a location. So, it will be next Monday, November 18, 6:00 p.m. And, more than likely -- and, definitely likely -- it will be in the southern region of New Jersey.

So, we'd like to thank everybody for coming out. This -- as I stated earlier with Co-Chair Barlas -- this is our third hearing. At this point, now, we are looking forward to continued testimony to make sure that people understand that this is nothing that is already, you know, ready to go. This is something that is definitely-- We are sitting here listening to, on both sides of the aisle, which is best for the residents of New Jersey.

At this time, we're going to ask everybody to stand for the flag salute.

(Pledge of Allegiance is recited)

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: At this time, roll call.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman Scharfenberger.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHARFENBERGER: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman Rodriguez.

ASSEMBLYMAN RODRIGUEZ: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman McClellan.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Present.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Present.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman Inganamort.

ASSEMBLYMAN INGANAMORT: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Vice-Chair -- Co-Vice Chair Reynolds-Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VERLINA REYNOLDS-JACKSON
(Co-Vice Chair): Present.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Co-Chair Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Co-Chair Barlas.

ASSEMBLYMAN AL BARLAS (Co-Chair): Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: You have a quorum.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: At this time, Co-Chair Barlas, a few remarks before we get started?

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: Sure; thank you, Chair.

To echo what Assemblyman Wimberly said, this is our third hearing, our second public hearing. We have another one scheduled for next week. We should have one more. We anticipate one more after that, which we're working out the logistics. Our goal, theoretically, is for that one to be a virtual hearing to increase participation as well, from the public.

I believe -- I can speak for the Co-Chair on this -- we found these hearings, so far, to be actually very informative. It's been a pleasure to hear from our residents. It's heartening to see how many people actually

care about this process, and how thoughtful they have been in the reasoning and the rationale that they have come up with. And, I know that is all going into a bucket to help us all figure out what we're going to do next. Because it just isn't as simple as, "Do what the judge told you to do."

So, with that, Co-Chair, I've got nothing else.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you.

And, we're going to ask everybody who is testifying to keep their testimony up to -- under three minutes or more. I will give leeway to our mayors of each of the cities, and we do welcome -- it being his hometown -- the Mayor of Newark, Ras Baraka.

And, NJIT for hosting us today -- we'd like to thank NJIT.

This is my first time in this unbelievably beautiful building that I was pretty lost in. I made it from the third floor to the second floor to the back. But, this is absolutely beautiful.

But, our first person who will testify today is the Mayor of Jersey City, Mayor Steve Fulop.

MAYOR STEVEN M. FULOP: Good afternoon.

My name is Steven Fulop, and I currently am and serve as the Mayor of Jersey City; and, currently, a candidate for Governor in the State of New Jersey.

I want to thank the Assembly members for the opportunity to testify with regards to ballot design and what constitutes a fair ballot here in New Jersey. It's a topic of great importance to me, as someone who intends to be on the ballot next year, and I know it's a topic of great importance for many candidates, down ballot, who are running for the office of State

Assembly themselves, as well as some who are running for County Commissioner.

I want to highlight that in the spring of 2024, after testimony, Judge Quraishi clearly defined what constitutes a fair ballot, and the verdict was unanimously upheld by an appellate court, which tells you again the merits of the argument on how democracy has been undermined by the ballot construct here in New Jersey.

In his ruling, Judge Quraishi indicated the importance of a separate and equal draw for each candidate for each office. I want to repeat that just for emphasis: a separate and equal draw for each candidate for each office within the block ballot construct that all other states use.

It's for this reason that there is great skepticism over the intent of this Committee. If the goal was to codify the ruling of Judge Quraishi, then a committee wouldn't really be necessary on that front. But, if there is intent to circumvent -- like some think there is -- then, clearly, this is the process that one would pursue.

I want to put on record, though, it's not enough to use the term "block ballot design," but, at the same time, undermine the intent of the separate and equal draw for each candidate. That includes special marks; preferences of ballot position within block and ballot; or bracketing of candidates that gives one candidate a visual advantage over another.

I want to focus my time on bracketing, because that clearly is a deviation from the intent of Judge Quraishi's ruling of each candidate having an individual ballot draw. Since each Assembly member already has the right to associate via a slogan, a bracket only serves to visually skew the ballot design. The idea of bracketing clearly discriminates against

candidates who don't want or can't bracket with other candidates. Bracketing places those single candidates at a visual disadvantage, similar to the line, and does not uphold each candidate with an individual draw. Rather than spending your time on creating an advantage that would surely end up in court again -- and also be a political liability for people who support it -- I would implore you to spend your time not only on the ballot design process, but also how is the ballot endorsement achieved, and the reform that is necessary there by recognized parties.

We saw in the Senate primary that the slogans and ballot construct being considered today are a direct product of a county process that, in some instances, is corrupt in many areas of the state. Some counties have no convention at all to achieve party support; some force a public vote so they can watch how people vote; some allow only placed municipal chairs to actually vote; some have a chairman that can override an advisory vote by the committee; and, some counties allow the chairman to stack the deck with superdelegates. All of this is directly related to how the ballot is designed. All of those undermine democracy, and if we're discussing association and democracy in New Jersey, then the process on how we achieve the ballot construct should be uniform as much as the ballot design is something that you consider.

The process should be each individual committee person gets one vote in a closed and private ballot for a binding outcome -- that's all. Anything less is merely protecting the status quo. This is an opportunity for progress, with the public rightfully skeptical of your intent. It is with this in mind I encourage you to uphold and codify Judge Quraishi's rulings of a separate and equal draw for each candidate for each office within the

block ballot construct. No bracketing; no special marks; no special placement.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I am going to leave a copy of my comments with the clerk for the record as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Mayor.

Are there any questions for Mayor Fulop?

Yes, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN INGANAMORT: Thank you very much, Mayor.

Here is my question for you.

MAYOR FULOP: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN INGANAMORT: Your comments regarding the ballot -- I believe you were referring to the primary ballot. Do they also apply to the general election ballot?

MAYOR FULOP: My feeling is that the line process -- the line process is not just-- I believe that the line process should be gone and absolute. I think that stands for both the general and the primary. I think that if you're going to create a fair democracy in New Jersey and not have a skewed ballot either way, I think that you do need to consider that.

I recognize that we live in a state that has skewed Democratic for a long time, and many Democrats would probably say that a ballot construct in November creates an advantage that's favorable for them. If we're being absolutely fair about democracy in this state, we should have block ballot design both in the primary and general.

ASSEMBLYMAN INGANAMORT: I appreciate that very much.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Any other members?

Yes, Co-Chair.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: Do you think this no bracketing should apply just to the primary, or to all elections?

MAYOR FULOP: What would it look like in the general? I mean--

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: No, no, I'm saying nonpartisan elections as well.

MAYOR FULOP: Yes, I think -- I do think -- I think that if you have the right to associate and share a slogan, that is enough. I think skewing a bracket-- Skewing with bracketing creates a visual advantage in Board of Education elections. In council races in Jersey City, you'd certainly see that the bracketing is a visual advantage, and I think that that should be done with uniformly throughout the State of New Jersey.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK; great.

Thank you.

MAYOR FULOP: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Mayor.

MAYOR FULOP: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next, we have the Mayor of Newark, Mayor Ras Baraka.

MAYOR RAS BARAKA: Thank you.

So, first I just want to thank the Committee for being here in Newark. We appreciate your presence.

Thank NJIT, the President of this university, for allowing this space to be used for this function. We deeply appreciate it, and I'll try to make it to as many as I can.

I heard some comments from the first one. Some of them were OK; some of them I had a little (indiscernible) take umbrage with.

I would like -- if you would allow me -- to dedicate my comments -- they're not a lot -- to two people who I think really need to be highlighted, because historically -- because the reason that we're here today -- people are here for different reasons and for different motivations. Obviously, my name is on that ballot as well next year, but, ultimately, I think I'm here for a larger reason in my mind, here in the City of Newark.

I would like to dedicate these comments to two people: Robert Smalls is one of them; the other person is Fannie Lou Hamer.

Robert Smalls was a slave in the Carolinas, who, in fact, commandeered a Confederate boat and, with 17 slaves on it, took it to the north, to the Union side. And, before he did that, he rendezvoused with his wife and kids and picked them up and put them on a boat and they left. That's just the beginning of the story; end of the story is that Congress paid him money, half the money for the boat that he had, and after the Civil War, he actually bought his master's home. This man came back and was elected to the State Assembly, elected to the State Senate, and served in Congress for as long as reconstruction existed in the south. It's an amazing story; it's an amazing American story. I'm sure he didn't know what a referendum was, or what the Assembly role was at the time -- or the State Senate's role at the time was. But, I think that because of him, a lot of us are sitting up here today.

The other person is Fannie Lou Hamer, who found out before she ran for office -- just two years before that -- that she could actually register to vote at a (indiscernible) meeting. Her family was sharecroppers. Sharecroppers are people who stayed on the plantation and worked for food or housing, right. (indiscernible) a large, huge family. We know this lady in the history of New Jersey because she showed up here in Atlantic City as a Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, to make sure that the Democratic party was not segregated and completely white. She did that and ran for office later. Because of her efforts, the 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed a year before she showed up in New Jersey, in Atlantic City, fighting for her ability to vote. I'm sure she could not read everything on a referendum, on a ballot. I'm sure she couldn't go through all the ins and outs of what legislation was, or could really explain to you the particulars of every policy that existed, or how this thing worked.

But, that wasn't an excuse then, and it's not an excuse now, to prevent her from having access to democracy. That wasn't an excuse, and it shouldn't be, as we're (indiscernible) in the south. Those are two people who I thought here, sitting here at NJIT in the City of Newark on Martin Luther King Boulevard, that it was appropriate for me to talk about before -- hopefully, I didn't disobey any rules to say their names right before I gave my comments.

So, I just want to thank the opportunity to speak here today. I think what we're doing strikes at the very heart of our democracy -- in fact, it is -- speaks volumes to what we just witnessed on the November Tuesday election.

The use of the line on our ballots was and has always been an anti-democratic practice. As leaders in New Jersey, we have long known it was wrong, yet we allowed it to persist for decades. And, while the Judge is poised to strike the line completely, this Committee has a crucial choice: We can either cling to political gainsmanship and undermine fair representation and chip away at public trust that's already eroded; or, take a decisive step forward to make democracy the sole priority.

We really have two paths in front of us: We could attempt to manipulate and build the line by another name, knowing that it creates barriers to true democratic choice, and reinforces a sense of disenfranchisement among voters; or, we could end this practice now. No political maneuvering; no more power plays. We have the opportunity right here, right now, to respect the court's decision on a ballot design and commit ourselves to a clear and democratic path forward. It is our moment to leave behind outdated practices and embrace a fair way to conduct our primaries in all of our elections.

My hope is that this Committee's goal is very clear; it's fair; it's accessible; and simple. A ballot that empowers every voter and every candidate equally -- *even* if that person was Fannie Lou Hamer, or Robert Smalls. This isn't complicated. We know how to make our ballots fair, and the people of New Jersey deserve a process that honors their voices and reflects our state's true diversity and values.

So, I urge you to put any ideas aside that would take us in an anti-democratic way and move righteously into a new era of transparency and equity in our elections.

Last week in the wake of the election, I said democracy was sacrificed at the altar of indifference. Now, everybody might not believe that, but I do. We must recognize that the line, and any version of it, breeds that very indifference. And, let's be clear, fixing the ballot design is just the beginning of what we should do to strengthen democracy in New Jersey.

There are a few things that we should be thinking about doing: Same-day registration; we should be thinking about allowing 16-year-olds to register to vote for School Board elections; we should be thinking about how to get more participation and not less; and, get rid of policies that discourage voting and make sure they don't exist, because they don't exist by accident.

This ballot design is a first step -- a first step to let the working people and the working families of New Jersey know that we are going to allow access to every single person. And, every little thing -- even on accident or on purpose, by design, or by happenstance -- we're going to get rid of any obstacles to make the process fair and democratic; either real or perceived. It is our only step, our only path, our only journey forward to what true democracy looks like in New Jersey, and we must embrace it. We must embrace it wholeheartedly and completely. And, with that, we embrace inclusivity; transparency; ease of access; robust participation for all; and discouraging anything that creates apathy and disengagement so we can get what we just witnessed in the last national election.

God bless you, Godspeed to you, and thank you for giving me the opportunity today.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Mayor.

Do we have any questions for the Mayor?

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I do.

I wanted to ask several other speakers this question about doing away with the primary and just having a general.

What are your thoughts around that?

MAYOR BARAKA: Well, that's interesting. And, you know, ultimately, I think there's some useful primary elections.

But, if we believe that having just a general election is going to create more democracy-- What I do believe what we should do is begin to change when our elections take place. That, instead of having this off year, that we should participate the same as the rest of Americans and have it in a year where most Americans participate in a national race. That we have our Governor's race at the same time as the national elections take place, and we begin to stop these off-ballot years and begin to do it collectively, so that we get more participation and greater participation from the electorate.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Everybody is good?

Thank you, Mayor, once again.

We definitely appreciate being here in Newark, and NJIT--
You have another question?

Assemblywoman Pintor Marin.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PINTOR MARIN: I just wanted to say thank you, Mayor--

MAYOR BARAKA: You're very welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PINTOR MARIN: It's such a pleasure to have you, and thank you for participating.

MAYOR BARAKA: Thank you.

I appreciate you guys.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next, we have Lavanya Raghavan from AAPI New Jersey.

LAVANYA RAGHAVAN: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you so much for having me speak here.

My name is Lavanya Raghavan; I am a Board Member at AAPI New Jersey, the largest Pan Asian organization in New Jersey

I became a naturalized citizen of the United States on August 20, 2013, right here in Newark, New Jersey. This was a momentous day for me. Becoming a citizen meant relinquishing my former nationality; swearing allegiance to the United States; embracing the rights and responsibilities of an American; and, most notably, the right to vote.

I come from India, the world's largest modern democracy, and have immigrated to the United States -- one of the world's oldest modern democracies. Experiencing two different democratic systems has given me a unique perspective. In India, citizens take their right to vote seriously; however, the system has faced persistent challenges. Corruption and bribery are widespread; political power is commonly backed by money and muscle power, and long lines at polling stations; missing names on lists are common frustrations.

You can understand, then, that to cast my vote freely and fairly in the United States felt like both a right and an honor. A little over a year after my naturalization, I cast my first vote in the 2014 primary election. I

was surprised -- and, frankly, puzzled -- by the ballot design. Rather than grouping candidates by office, the ballot presented them in an order that was neither intuitive nor accessible. A confusing array of names and positions that required me to scan the entire list to identify candidates. To add to this confusion was the kindly advice from my neighbor, who encouraged me to go with line A -- or, was it line B? Who could tell.

Even with my graduate level educational background and proficiency in English, I struggled to navigate the ballot. For those facing language barriers, I can only imagine how much more daunting this experience might be.

Based on my experience as a first-time voter over a decade ago, I strongly urge the Committee to simplify the ballot design. A clearer ballot would not only make voting more accessible, but would also empower more of us to participate confidently in our democracy. Grouping candidates by office, as is common in many other states, would make the ballot more user friendly. A redesigned ballot is essential to ensure that every -- each one of our voices -- are represented equitably, without inadvertent barriers that could lead to disenfranchisement.

This is a crucial step towards ensuring that all citizens -- whether lifelong citizens or newly naturalized immigrants, as I once was -- feel welcomed and empowered in this process.

Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you very much.

Do we have any questions? (No response)

Thank you very much.

Next, we have Brittany D. Claybrooks.

BRITTANY D. CLAYBROOKS: Good evening, everyone.

My name is Brittany Claybrooks; I am a former Councilwoman in the City of East Orange. I also previously served as the North Jersey Political Director for now Senator-Elect Andy Kim. So, you can imagine why I'm sitting here. And, I just announced today that I do intend to run for Assembly in the 34th District.

I am going to come from a little bit more of a personal experience that I've had with this situation, and then move into what I believe the ballot design should be.

As a Councilwoman, it is arguably -- we can arguably agree, in my city, that I've gotten a lot done, a lot passed. But, the day I decided not to do what my Chairman had asked me to do, I was told that there was no way I would ever make it to a ballot fairly, and that I had to be kicked off of what is called, "the line."

And, as we sit here today having made so much progress, I think my concern around not upholding the judge's recommendation, or his ruling, is that we will create -- continue to create ways for people to be locked out of the ballot. And, as you know, good policies are made by people electing people. And, I do believe everyone has a fair right to run, and not run when somebody gives them permission; not run when they don't have their resources, and somebody tells them that they just have to go, but run and have a fair opportunity to run because they may be the best person for that job.

In the city where I come from, the very issues that we're fighting for and making progress on have halted; some of them still exist. And, I believe that has everything to do with the fact that folks don't feel

empowered to even enter onto a ballot, because they believe they're disadvantaged from the start. I happen to represent one of the counties where the Chairman can do whatever he wants, and there--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: I'm going to ask you to stay on the ballot, you know, design, and that issue--

MS. CLAYBROOKS: Correct--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: --and to stay away from personal comments--

MS. CLAYBROOK: Correct.

I believe that that -- that's a larger -- the effect of that comes from our ballot design. It is giving chairmans, it's giving people a disadvantage -- an unfair advantage for people to enter onto the ballot.

I do believe if people are able to enter onto the ballot freely and fairly, without association and visual advantages, then we'll begin to focus on who will best represent our interests.

I am not-- I am one of many, and so I recognize and I respect your comment; but, I don't think, in New Jersey, we can talk about this issue without talking about some of the structure -- and the political structure -- in a way that has created this very issue that we're talking about, which is why I've been able to serve the--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Ma'am, I don't have a problem with that.

If you make a generalization about chairmen across the board -- or chairwomen across the board -- that's fine--

MS. CLAYBROOKS: Chairman, yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: --but, directly, (indiscernible)

MS. CLAYBROOKS: Correct. Correct.

Well, I can't speak for other chairmen, but I do agree that sometimes it creates a party boss system which we've been fighting for, which ultimately has led us to where we are today. And, I appreciate you for allowing us to speak and asking the public -- and, not just the general public, but those of us who are seeking to serve -- what it is you can do. And, I really do believe you should uphold the judge's decision to keep it as fair as possible in primary, generals -- and it does not matter the level of race, either.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you very much.

Do we have any questions for Ms. Claybrooks? (no response)

Thank you very much.

MS. CLAYBROOKS: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next, we have Jill LaZare,
NOW New Jersey.

J I L L La Z A R E, Esq.: Hi, everybody.

First of all, I cannot tell you how excited I am that we are sitting here at all. I never thought, even in my lifetime, that we would see this. This is amazing.

I've been active since I'm 16 years old in New Jersey politics, and nationally, and it's been -- it's been a point of contention to have -- you'll excuse me, I know you're all elected officials -- but to have county bosses dictating who can and cannot reasonably run and be seriously considered for office.

So, good evening.

Thank you to all of you in the Committee for giving me an opportunity -- and all of the community members -- to share our thoughts, our experiences, on elections.

I am the President of National Organization for Women in New Jersey, and I am a former candidate for Assembly and State Senate in New Jersey's 21st District. And, I am also an attorney.

I have attached -- I think all of you should have gotten it -- a ballot from the 2024 primary election for Essex County. It could have been maybe other counties. I hope you all can see it. It's an example, in my opinion, of what is *not* what we should be doing in designing our ballots.

I am new to Essex County; I was in Union County for years. I grew up down in Monmouth County. And, this is the ballot from the primary in 2024.

And, it seems to have attempted to go along with the court decision, because it's boxed; however, if you look carefully at it, it doesn't achieve what we were hoping to achieve, because it will have all the regular - - let's see, Essex County Democratic Committee, Inc., straight across. Does everybody have it? It's straight across; it's just like saying to go down the party line. That, obviously, is not achieving what we were hoping to achieve with this court order.

So, the reason why it's not a good design is because it still has the names of the organizations next to the candidates names on it, and it is designed so all of the same county-awarded candidates are next to each other -- even though they are in blocks and, ostensibly, *not* on a county line, as you can see constructively -- it is still a county line, and still can go across

as, "Vote Column A," "Vote Column B," which is precisely what, if we want to be fairer, we are not going to do.

So, I set forth in detail in the court's decision that abolished the county line, the aim is for fairer ballots that do not disenfranchise the folks of our state or our candidates. Essex County did not achieve that; I'm not going to just say it was Essex County, because I did not look at all the county ballots. And, I'm sorry, I know I'm sitting in Essex County. I'm a resident of Essex County, and I love being in Essex County. So, please forgive me, Essex County elections -- Board of Elections -- I don't mean to call you out and say you're a bad guy.

But, as I said, I've run for office, and I've run for office on a party line, on the county line, and off the county line. And, there is no question that having the party line constructively puts a finger on the scale. But, we all know that -- I mean, we're all here--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Ms. LaZare, I'm going to ask you to wrap it up, if you could. We're going to try and keep it within three minutes.

But, if you can get to the point of whatever you handed out, we appreciate it.

MS. LaZARE: OK, then, as the President of NOW New Jersey, I will say that I think that using a county line, or titles, disenfranchises, disproportionately, women and especially women of color. It is not really the best for anybody in the state.

And, in closing, I ask the Committee tonight: Can we not do better? Do better with more freedom for independent thinking that is discouraged by having to comport to a county boss who may actually not

have all the best answers for all the people of our state. Maybe we could do so much better than we already are doing. I've essentially lived my entire life in New Jersey, and I love it. As great as it is, I believe it could be so much better with a more democratic process in choosing our elected officials -- which is all in all of your hands.

I appreciate all of you; I'm excited by this; and I thank you.

Have a good night.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you.

Do we have any questions for Ms. LaZare? (no response)

We're good down there? (no response)

Thank you very much.

MS. LAZARE: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next we have Lauren Dayton, a self-candidate -- as a candidate.

L A U R E N D A Y T O N, Esq.: My name is Lauren Dayton.

And, first of all, I want to thank you for holding this hearing in the first place. Many of us out here are very excited it's actually taking place.

I am here today because I am one of the few -- if not the only candidate -- who has successfully succeeded because of the ballot change in June. Andy Kim's lawsuit included my Assembly run; included past elections that showed the skewedness of our ballot design. I have run on and off the "ballot line," as we say, in Tenafly, New Jersey, and for District 37. Assemblywoman Park is here; she actually won the seat that I was going for.

Last 2023, having run off the line for Assembly, I was abandoned by our municipal party and not given the “line” to run. I was running against an accused pedophile. He won on the line. I was very disheartened as a candidate, and didn’t want anything to do with New Jersey politics again. But, then Andy Kim, Senator-Elect, brought this lawsuit and changed our opportunity to become candidates here in New Jersey.

This lawsuit allowed me to seek and become a candidate in the June 2024 primary without seeking party endorsement or approval. Even though I am a strong party Democrat and have done work for six years at Tenafly as its Councilwoman on the Democratic ticket. In 2024, in June, I won my election with the new ballot design.

I went to the hearing -- I don’t know if it’s called a hearing -- but, I went to the ballot draw in which they put our names in a box, and they laughed, and the clerk shook it around and pulled out names out of a hat. And, I actually got placed Number 3 out of three. But, it was a fairer process, and I still won with the most votes, and I just got re-elected with the most votes -- I actually beat Congressman Gottheimer in my town with the most votes, because, I do the work.

But, my community is so confused by the ballot, that when I wasn’t on the line, they didn’t know how to find me, even though they had voted for me for six straight years and had supported my candidacy. And, again, were so confused they voted in an accused criminal.

Today, I ask you to uphold Judge Quraishi’s -- if I say his name wrong, please excuse me -- his ruling. It is clear that the way the ballot draw needs to take place must be neutral. It is also clear that to allow more

robust debate; better candidates; more diverse candidates in both interest and minorities and women; for them to become candidates, the party system in New Jersey, including the ability to pick and sway who is on the lines of the candidates, needs to change.

So, it wasn't a great process in June, pulling these funny little names out of a hat that they had printed. Was that more neutral? Yes, it was. We could do better, though, as Jill just said. We *can* do better. Judge Quraishi's ruling -- the separate but equal ballot draw -- has to take place for both primary and general elections. It really does bring new voices to the table.

I am actually going to skip over this long speech that I wrote, and I want to discuss--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: I'm sorry, if you could wrap it up at this point, ma'am--

MS. DAYTON: I am.

I want to discuss party slogan. Because it really is just a backhanded way of bracketing candidates. Currently, in June, in this primary election, the candidates -- again -- picked a party slogan, and I didn't get the "party slogan" of the Bergen County party. I had my own party, which I had run in with the Assembly, when I ran off the line, and I chose that slogan.

But, if we are brave enough to actually face the prejudices in the system and recognize that we are keeping out good candidates and disenfranchising voters at extreme rates, then we *have* to be brave enough to get rid of this bracketing by party slogan as well. Because anything less is just going back to the same.

And, so, I implore you, as you reconsider this party design, to figure out how heavy a hand you want the party chairman to have. Because it is disenfranchising voters. Most voters, most voting in this country -- excuse me, in this county, excuse me -- where I am, is Bergen County, is 30%, which means 70% of your registered voters are sitting home.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you very much.

Any questions for Ms. Dayton?

Yes, (indiscernible) Co-Chair.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: Thank you.

Thank you for being here.

Just-- I wasn't following what you were saying about slogan.

Are you saying get rid of it entirely, or?

MS. DAYTON: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: In the primary? So, just--

MS. DAYTON: Yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: --no slogan, it's just, this the Democrats or Republicans and just your name?

MS. DAYTON: These are people who qualify to be candidates; they have achieved the signatures. They are not given the preference of any party chairman or party, municipal party. They are candidates.

I know a doctor who can't run; I know a teacher who can't run, because they don't know the party chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: But, you are also free to come up with your own slogan, if you so choose.

So, are you saying -- I'm just asking. I'm not, you know, I'm just asking.

So, you're saying no slogans for anybody?

MS. DAYTON: So, I am a lawyer, First Amendment, obviously you have a right to associate, you have a right to create a slogan in an election.

But, you have to understand the way that the slogans are working are, essentially, the same as bracketing. And, Mayor Fulop is very clear in his speech, it is backhanded bracketing. It is essentially saying who the party prefers, who the chairman prefers, where the money and funding is going.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: So, in that case, they use his name as their slogan, in Jersey City, with an actual bracket, like the English grammar bracket, in the nonpartisan race. So, you're saying no to both?

MS. DAYTON: I think if someone wants to support candidate Lauren Dayton, they can support candidate Lauren Dayton. But, when candidate Lauren Dayton becomes, "The Real Bergen Democrats," or, "The Party Democrats," or, you know, the "Republicans," or, "The Red Republicans" -- whatever it is -- and six other people on the ballot have the same bracket -- "bracketed," or slogan, excuse me -- and, we are seen as a line, voters are not that naïve that they don't see the connections.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: And, then, the other question I had -- because we hear this a lot -- is just, codify what Judge Quraishi said, right? As if we should just create NJSA 19:Quraishi, that's it.

Part of what he said was "separate but equal draw." He did it across the board on the Democratic side for every office, whether or not you

had a primary -- whether or not you had an opponent, I should say. Are you saying -- or, is your opinion -- that that should happen, even if you are uncontested? Or, is it safe to say that if it's one person filing, they're going to be first no matter what? Or, if there's two people filing, they're going to be one and two?

MS. DAYTON: The point of the election is to let people have conversation and debate -- robust debate. And, even if you are an unopposed candidate, the ideas you might bring to the table might change hearts and minds of the other candidates--

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: No, no, I'm not saying that. I'm saying, on a--

MS. DAYTON: So--

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: --draw. You went and witnessed a draw. You were -- you came in third--

MS. DAYTON: I did--

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: --so you were drawn third. So there were three people?

MS. DAYTON: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK.

So, for how many seats?

MS. DAYTON: For two.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK.

So, if there were only two people who filed, should there have been a draw, is the question I'm asking.

MS. DAYTON: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK.

MS. DAYTON: I think it should just be neutral.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK.

MS. DAYTON: So, draw for all seats.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK.

MS. DAYTON: Also, the first person sometimes gets more votes than the second person, so let that be neutral, even though they're on maybe the same position; maybe they're unopposed; or maybe voting counts is important to a candidate.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: OK, that was it.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you very much.

MS. DAYTON: Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next, we have Ronald Chen.

R O N A L D C H E N, Esq.: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair and Mr. Co-Chair, and esteemed members of the Commission.

My name is Ronald Chen; I speak tonight solely in my individual capacity, but just for purposes of identification, I am a Distinguished Professor of Law at Rutgers Law School -- it's literally across the street -- and I am a member of the National Board and one of the three general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union. For those with a long memory, I had my stint in State service as the State's sixth and currently last public advocate under Governor Corzine.

I advocate a very straightforward position. I urge the Commission to recommend an office block format, in the spirit of what Judge Quraishi was certainly describing, for all elections -- both primaries and general -- which can be acceptable with a slogan. And, with that, I

think that ballot best does what a ballot is really designed to do, and I think we have to keep in mind the purpose of the ballot is to ascertain the views and expressions of the voter. It is not the proper place for the candidates or political parties to express their views.

Now, as a very staunch First Amendment advocate who has litigated these issues, I consider myself as much an absolutist on the First Amendment as anyone else, and I teach in this area. But, no one would say that the First Amendment -- or the right to free expression -- requires that a candidate or parties have the ability to express themselves, including their affiliations, in every possible time, place, or manner.

And, the ballot, again, is a place for the voter to express their views. And, therefore, devices such as the county line and bracketing detract from that, and there is no constitutional right to use those devices on the ballot -- although certainly there would absolutely be a constitutional right to express their affiliation in another forum.

Even the slogan, frankly, is -- I don't think is constitutionally required. A number of states do without the slogan. But, I think any interest that the candidates and parties might have in expressing their association with each other is more than amply satisfied by having an office block format with a slogan by which -- if you wish to know which candidates associate with each other -- they can do with the slogan. But, otherwise, the manner of presentation of the candidates should be completely neutral and without any devices such as bracketing or the line or special marks that are outside the neutral principles that I just discussed.

That's really all I have to say.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chen.

Do we have any questions for Mr. Chen?

Yes, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, Mr. Chen, for coming.

I'm very concerned about educating voters about this new ballot design that we're going to do. Any recommendations?

MR. CHEN: Well, I don't mean to minimize that concern at all, but lists like that, by which an office block appears, are the types of ways in everyday life we tend to express our views in a lot of -- in a lot of context. So, I'm not sure that an average voter would need too much educating if the block is, "This is for the voting for office of the President of the United States, here are the names." The manner in which they express themselves to actually express their viewpoint I don't think will be too hard to explain.

But, I absolutely agree that any time you change a ballot, especially a form that has been so -- how should I put this -- unique to New Jersey for so many years, that there should be a very robust public education system exactly showing what this new ballot is going to look like. We obviously got a little bit of that over the summer with the office block format in the primary. But, so, I think with that ample effort, that education, explaining the office block format, will not be an insurmountable task.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Any more questions for Mr. Chen? (no response)

Thank you.

MR. CHEN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next, we have Eleana Little.

E L E A N A L I T T L E: Hi; good evening, Assembly members.

My name is Eleana Little, and I am a resident and registered voter in Jersey City.

Thank you for your time tonight.

I am here tonight to urge the Assembly not to put their thumb on the scale of primary ballots, and to move forward with codifying office block ballot design with no special designation for incumbents or endorsees.

I've run in Democratic primaries off the line three times -- for County Commissioner in 2020; for County Democratic Committee in 2021; and, for County Executive in 2023. I am going to speak tonight from my personal experience. Each time, people asked me if I was crazy. This is because the county line suppresses people who would otherwise choose to run for office. People couldn't understand why someone would throw their hat in the ring when the odds were stacked against them.

And, I understand this varies by county, but in Hudson County, the process for the party endorsing its nominees is completely opaque. I was not given an opportunity to seek the party's endorsement, nor were County Committee members given a say. Now, I understand this varies by county, so this is not a statement on *all* counties, it is a statement on my county.

In practice, I have seen the line function as a tool to deceive voters. In 2020, we were on the ballot during a presidential primary, and the Hudson County Democratic Organization bracketed their endorsed

candidates with Joe Biden, who, at the time, was the presumptive nominee. The HCDO line misleadingly implied that Biden had supported or endorsed all the candidates lined up under him, when I'm nearly certain Joe Biden was not briefed on the Hudson County Commissioner race in District 4. You know, I had voters ask me, "Does this mean that Biden endorsed all these people?" And, I said, "No." But, that's what the appearance signified to people.

On top of this, the HCDO sent out mailers and hung up posters urging voters to, "Stop Trump, vote Column B" in a Democratic primary, where Trump was not on the ballot, which only served to deceive and confuse voters in the middle of a global pandemic and an unprecedented vote-by-mail July primary.

I strongly believe that competitive primaries yield stronger candidates for the general election. In my opinion, Democrats saw this at the Federal level just last week. By forgoing a primary process, Vice President Harris did not have an opportunity to practice or hone her messages for a national audience and may have underperformed as a result. But, this is not exclusive to Democrats. Republicans, too, should welcome competitive primaries to better prepare their candidates.

Attempts by county parties to put their thumbs on the scale and pre-select their candidates through ballot design result in candidates who can get caught off guard in the general election.

So, I strongly urge the Assembly not to attempt to recreate the line or to create any preferential status for candidates through ballot design. Please do not circumvent Judge Quraishi's decision. Please move forward with codifying office block ballots.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you very much.

Do we have any questions? (no response)

Thank you very much.

MS. LITTLE: Thanks.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Next, we have Charlie Kratovil -- Food and Water Watch.

CHARLIE KRATOVIL: Good evening, Committee members.

Charlie Kratovil; I spoke with you at your last meeting in my personal capacity, and I am back tonight to speak on behalf of Food and Water Watch, a national environmental organization, and our 72,000 members around the State of New Jersey.

I'll try not to be repetitive of the points I made on Thursday, but, rather, to elaborate and make some new points on the same topics.

We support office block ballots. They are the way to go, not only for the primary elections, but for all elections. We believe this would be good for voters, but also for political parties, because robust, competitive, fair primary elections are the best way for parties to choose the strongest and best candidates that have public support from their party members.

And, we also support rank choice voting -- opportunity to give voters more of a voice, and finally end the spoiler effect. I think that we're all familiar with this concept of voters feeling pressure to choose the so-called lesser of two evils. Fear-based voting is not good for anyone, and rank-choice voting will end that. Rank-choice voting is a chance to enable people to express themselves more thoroughly with every vote they make by expressing their first choice; their second choice; and so on.

I also think -- we also think -- that more information should be made available to voters outside of the ballot. Things like a voter guide, with statements from candidates, so that candidates can express themselves in more than just a slogan.

We also believe that independent authority should be entrusted with ballot design, not elected partisan officials.

And, finally, we need *less* power for political parties. Our current system currently gives too much power to political party committees, which are largely unregulated private organizations; not standardized; and, all too often, unfair and undemocratic in how they run their organizations. Simply by virtue of the way they're comprised, they often have unequal representation for people who live in different areas; closed and secretive processes; and a boss-dominated structure.

This is our chance, New Jersey -- once-in-a generation chance -- to upend the boss system and give power to the people it really, truly belongs to: the people.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Mr. Kratovil.

Any questions? (no response)

Thank you very much.

Next, we have Ron Bautista.

R O N B A U T I S T A: Good evening, everyone, how are you?

My name is Ron Bautista; I have been a U.S. citizen since 2017, and I have run for office off the line as a Democrat in Hudson County for the District 5 County Commissioner -- twice -- and lived to tell the story.

But, that's not where my story started. I was an undocumented immigrant for 11 years, due to a long immigration process. I was fortunate that it was *only* 11 years -- that's another story. However, the reason why I became involved in politics was because I had to migrate because of politics; because of political corruption. So, in my mind and in my household, how I saw it was, you either get involved with politics and change it, or you see the negative impact of politics on you and your families and your loved ones.

So, when I got my green card, I said, "Oh, I can run for office in five years, because I can become a U.S. citizen in five years after getting my green card." So, I did. I built a whole plan, and yes, we're -- just like many underserved communities -- we're resilient, and we said, "Well, I know that the system says that you cannot win; that you cannot run; that you shouldn't run," because of how the system is set in place. And, then we do things anyway. And, so, I did. I prepared myself; I went through the (indiscernible) Council Progressive Fellowship Program. I ran for office a couple of times for Mayor of Hoboken, because I had my theory, my political theory, in 2017. I ran for City Council in 2019; I got 33% against a 20-year incumbent.

And, then, in 2020, I got the call from other Democrats who wanted to run off the line, and said, "The only way that we can run off the line is if we partner up together and see how we can challenge (indiscernible) the system that is in place." And, so, we ran, and I got 33% -- 39% of the vote in that election. And, then I said, "Well, let's try it again." So, I tried it again in 2023, in June. This was, again, against the party line. And, I only missed it by 200 votes.

Now, just because I was close, people were saying, “This is weird. This is strange that somebody could come this close to winning a seat off the party line. That shouldn’t be the case.” And, so-- And, I’m going to wrap up, sorry. But, just because we are resilient doesn’t mean the system is fair. And, so, that’s what we’re asking for, is for a fair chance, an equal opportunity for anyone and everyday people to run for office, and that’s why I support a block vote.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Questions for Mr. Bautista?

(no response)

That sounds like a movie, Mr. Bautista. I can’t wait to see you win. I’m going to remember you.

MR. BAUTISTA: I appreciate it.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: All right, thanks.

MR. BAUTISTA: Have a good one.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Frank Pallotta -- former Congressional candidate.

F R A N K P A L L O T T A: Thank you all very much for your time.

Former Congressional candidate, '20 and '22; also a current exploratory candidate for Assembly in District 39.

Good evening esteemed members of the Committee.

My name is Frank Pallotta, and I stand before you here today as a former 2020 and 2022 Republican New Jersey House candidate for Congress. But, even more so, as a deeply concerned citizen of the great state of New Jersey.

I am here to speak out against the unjust and undemocratic process of the so-called “county line,” and to demand that this body enact real and meaningful ballot reform.

New Jersey shamefully stands alone in its practice of allowing party insiders to dictate the order of candidates on the primary ballot. This is not just unconstitutional, but raises the specter of breeding outright corruption in both our selection *and* our election process. Yet, we permit this arcane system to persist, creating corruption in its purest form.

I am not here speculating or theorizing. I am here sharing a personal experience, because I lived the corruption. In the months leading up to my 2020 primary, I began receiving a steady stream of texts from an insider in the Bergen County Republican Organization. The man was straightforward: Pay up if I wanted a favorable position on the primary ballot. The term used was simple, “Buy the line.” When I refused, and my support with the voters began to swell as my campaign progressed, the threats accelerated.

The more resolute I remained in refusing extortion threats, the more forceful the threats became. “What are you talking about? I negotiated to give you the line if you gave the money, and you kept saying no.” I was clearly being pressured to purchase my own spot on the ballot. The final text I received was chilling in its certainty, “Here’s what I can absolutely assure you: If you don’t do anything -- blank -- we’ll get the BCRO’s support.” And, just like that, following my final refusal to pay the ransom, its Chairman and the Parliamentarian of the BCRO canceled the Bergen County Convention and handed the organizational line to the other

candidate, without a single county committee member ever casting a single vote.

This is the true cost of the county line system. It doesn't just breed corruption, it actively silences new voices and discourages good and decent people from running for office. Competition is the lifeblood of our democracy, and the county line construct bleeds it dry. I am your living proof. New Jersey can no longer remain the outlier. The county line isn't just unconstitutional, it's morally wrong. It is no longer a harmless relic of the past; it is an active cancer on our electoral process, and it's time for a cure. Let's put the power back where it belongs, into the hands of the voters.

I am here to urge you, for the sake of our great democracy, and the peoples' trust in our government, to abolish the county line altogether, and not to give it a new life in a completely different form. Give New Jersey voters the choice they deserve. Let candidates compete on ideas, not the extortive exercises of selling the line to the highest bidder -- a practice intended to line the pockets of bosses. Let's show the rest of the country that New Jersey believes in free and fair elections. No more buying the line; no more threats; no more back-room deals. It is now time for real reform.

The people of New Jersey are asking for better. I demand better, and we all deserve better. History will remember you for what you do here today. I pray that you have the courage to do what's right.

Thank you very much for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Mr. Pallotta.

Do we have any questions for Mr. Pallotta? (no response)

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thanks for your time.

Next, we have Chloe Desir.

Chloe.

She stepped out? We'll come back to her.

Then we have Roger Bacon.

R O G E R B A C O N: I'm with Mr. Pallotta about this (indiscernible), whatever he said. The county line?

I'm Roger Bacon from Phillipsburg; I'm a candidate for Governor next year.

And, my issue is really not with the ballot, but ballot petition access. Seems to me before Governor Murphy became-- Is that a part of this conversation, ballot petition access?

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: You have the three minutes.

MR. BACON: OK, so, anyway, before Governor Murphy, ballot petitions were accessible 24/7, 365 on the website. And, now, Phil Murphy is the Governor and they're only available, like, from the end of January until you have to submit them in April -- that's like, eight weeks of the worst weather we have in New Jersey. For a guy like me who has to get 1,000 signatures, that's really tough.

I say go back to ballot petition access 24/7. There should be no restrictions on ballot petitions, you know, because they're the people with documents -- they're for the people. That's how I feel about it. And, like Mr. Pallotta said, there's an issue for this county line thing, it should be abolished. I'm with him on that.

Do you have any questions?

(laughter)

MR. BACON: I'm a Bill of Rights guy; I'm for the Bill of Rights. I'm the voice of the founders. That's just how I am; that's in me. I'm a mechanic; I know how to fix things.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Any questions for Mr. Bacon?
(no response)

MR. BACON: I guess not.

All right, thanks for giving me a chance to speak.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you.

Chloe.

And, I didn't want to mess up your last name.

CHLOE DESIR: Oh, my last name is DEZ-EAR.

ASSEMBLY WIMBERLY: DEZ-EAR; there you go.

MS. DESIR: Thank you.

Well, yes, I might as well introduce myself.

My name is Chloe; I am here out of my own volition, to make that very clear. I am a poly-sci major, so I really find this so riveting. But, nonetheless, I am an organizer here in Newark. I do a lot of environmental justice organizing in particular, which is an intersectional issue. We deal with housing in the midst of so many other things.

But, I want to preface by saying that I have zero context of what's going on here. I didn't know that there was two hearings before this, even, and I think that kind of just goes into the theme of what I really want to make clear here, is that there's so much misinformation and much of a necessity to get more voter education out here. I think that's the most important thing, because in my experience of organizing, I've realized that it's so important for people to be aware of who their local elected officials

even are, because a lot of them don't, and our voter turnout is close to abysmal.

So, I think that's one of the reasons why I think it's a great incentive for us to have a change to our ballot design, so people can know who y'all even are, you know? I think that's so important.

And, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, I think it was great that you even brought the question about seeing if we should even take out the primaries altogether. I think that's a concept that we should really think about, too, because a lot of folks don't even show up to the primaries, where they're actually having what I believe to be a much more involved election, and you have more options and candidates to look for, as opposed to who is being represented by the party.

I think it's also important to bring up that I want to come back here with more context, of course, and I probably should inquire a little bit more about this process, because -- I know that you said the next one is November 18 -- are there going to be more hearings following that as well?

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: There will be another virtual hearing after that.

MS. DESIR: OK.

And, also, when did this even come to fruition? This Board? This whole thing?

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Before last year's primary.

MS. DESIR: OK.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: So, I mean, I'm very glad to see a student. Are you a student here at NJIT?

MS. DESIR: No, but thank you for thinking that. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: So, I mean, it's really important that young folks like you get involved in this process.

And, to hear even numbers like only 30% of voters are coming out in Bergen County, that's pretty surprising.

MS. DESIR: I mean, in Newark it's less than 10--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: I live in Paterson where the numbers are very low, of voter turnout.

But I think-- Mayor Baraka said some outstanding things about getting kids involved in School Board elections at 16 -- day-of, able to register and vote on the same day, as many other states do -- and to encourage more people to get involved with the process regardless if you're a Republican or a Democrat.

MS. DESIR: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: So, I think we need young people like you.

So, I think you should go to our website, and I hope to see you very often down in Trenton in the future.

MS. DESIR: I mean, you're going to see me--

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Now, the next hearing, it's going to be way down in South Jersey -- unless you go to Rowan--

MS. DESIR: I went to Rowan, actually.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Well, then, come down and visit us next Monday. And, you might be able to tell us where to eat afterwards--

MS. DESIR: (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: --but we appreciate it.

But, we need your involvement. We need young folks' involvement.

MS. DESIR: Yes, that would be great.

I feel like it's so important to be a part of this process altogether, and I definitely want to go back to this virtual hearing with a lot more context and the ability to give you a more informed opinion about what I think about this altogether.

But, yes, thank you for holding this, it's exciting.

And, I mean, I'm eons away from believing we're going to see any of the things I *really* want to see here -- which is ranked choice voting, that was mentioned by Charlie earlier -- but, yes, let's start off with a ballot design.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you; appreciate it.

Do you have any questions for Ms. Desir? (no response)

Hanging out with Charlie, I know you're all right; we're good.

But, at this time, do any members have any comments before we close? (no response)

No comments? (no response)

So, once again, we'd like to thank NJIT for hosting us today. We thank the President, and we thank the staff -- a very able staff that we have here, some friends of ours who are working at NJIT.

We also thank the members of the Ballot Committee, because contrary to what people think, we do not have some legislation hidden in a drawer somewhere ready to go. If it is, I have not been privy to it -- have you been privy to it?

ASSEMBLYMAN BARLAS: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Not me either.

So, this is something that I believe that, you know, hearing the comments from the professionals who are in here and the everyday person who is very concerned about it. But, one of the main issues I think is voter turnout, and disenfranchising voters should be concerns for everybody; I don't care what party you're a part of.

So, I think that's something that we have to continue to work on and get folks involved in this process.

So, as stated earlier, we are still working on a location. It will be 6 p.m. next Monday, November 18, in the southern part of the state. There are issues with Wi-Fi that we are working out to make sure that will be able to be livestreamed. And, then, after that one there will be another virtual hearing before, I would say December -- before the holidays.

So, if there are no further comments, we would like to adjourn at this time.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)