

Summary of Recommendations from the MIAMI-DADE ELECTION REFORM COALITION

Staffing the Polling Place

√ The Coalition recommends that efforts be made to reproduce the County “triangle” (the Quality Assurance Manager, the Verification Specialist, and the Technical Support Specialist) utilizing primarily citizen poll workers. In order to retain the benefit of County expertise, one of the three positions could continue to be staffed by a County employee. Most likely, this would either be the Quality Assurance Manager or the Technical Support Specialist.

√ Non-County employees in the remaining two triangle positions should receive additional pay as necessary to attract competent individuals willing to perform these duties and undergo more intensive training. While the cost involved will be more than the general cost of poll worker pay and training in past elections (excluding November 5th), the amount will be far lower than the excessive funds necessary to compensate the large number of County employees for their time and effort on November 5th. In this regard, the County’s elected and un-elected leaders should take it upon themselves to use their positions of leadership to encourage the private sector to continue America’s tradition of civilian run elections.

Poll Worker Training

√ The Coalition recommends that the County mail out questionnaires to all County employees and polling place clerks who worked the polls on election day in order to obtain feedback on the training received and on problems that arose during the course of voting on November 5th. The questionnaires should be anonymous and should be returned directly to the County Commission’s Elections Oversight Task Force via the office of Commissioner Dennis Moss.

√ The Coalition recommends that poll worker training include a special section to provide particular emphasis on voters’ rights with regard to identification, changes of address, and assistance in the voting booth. Currently, all these items except change of address are reiterated in Section 26, “Do’s and Don’ts” of the Election Day Procedures Manual. However, the Do’s and Don’ts e-mail should be divided into sections with particular emphasis, through the use of bold-faced type, etc., on these problematic scenarios. These three areas should also be emphasized verbally during the poll worker training as a part of a required section on voters’ rights.

√ The Coalition recommends that effective testing of potential poll workers be conducted at the conclusion of training and that poll workers who fail to pass the test be prohibited from working the polls. Tests should be “closed book,” should include questions that emphasize an understanding of voters’ rights, and should be graded by the individual(s) conducting the training. Results, with names redacted, should be made part of the public record.

√ The Coalition recommends that both poll workers and polling place site contacts (i.e., the person responsible for the agreement to use a given location as a polling place) be clearly informed of the fifty-foot rule, and that any disputes with owners of private property to be used as polling places be identified and addressed prior to election day.

Provisional Balloting

√ The Coalition recommends that the County modify the Elections Procedures Manual to further emphasize the need to make sure the voter is in the correct precinct. The instructions should direct the poll worker not only to make it clear to the voter that the provisional ballot will not be accepted if the voter is in the wrong precinct (as the instructions currently indicate), but that the poll worker should check the precinct for each and every voter who wishes to use a provisional ballot before a provisional ballot is issued.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County devote a special section during all poll workers’ training to the need to check a voter’s precinct before issuing a provisional ballot.

√ The Coalition recommends that, as an aid to poll workers and voters alike, the County take steps to affirmatively educate voters as to the meaning of “proper” or “correct” precinct (e.g., if you have moved within

the County, your correct precinct is the one for your new address, even if you are not on that precinct's voter rolls).

Substitute Balloting

√ The Coalition recommends that instruction on the use of substitute ballots, also known as "back-up" ballots, be included in the training for *all* poll workers, and not just that of the Quality Assurance Managers, and that a specific section of instructions on use of the back-up system be included in the Elections Procedures Manual.

Language Assistance

√ The Coalition recommends that the County continue its use of sample ballots and that the sample ballots be mailed out in a single mailing that includes English, Spanish, and Creole versions. If the trilingual format becomes too cumbersome, the three versions can be printed separately and folded into a single trilingual cover sheet that indicates the availability of all three within.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County print all paper ballots – absentee, provisional, and substitute – in a trilingual format, thus making such ballots available to everyone in all precincts.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County assign poll workers dedicated to providing assistance in English/Creole and English/Spanish at all precincts whenever possible. In particular, English/Creole interpreters must be provided in those precincts formerly designated as having a high portion of the electorate that is Haitian-American. Having a bilingual poll worker designated specifically to provide assistance is crucial under the new compartmentalized staff assignments of the polling place. Depending on poll workers with specific assignments to provide language assistance necessarily means that other equally important duties will be neglected.

√ The Coalition recommends that the Elections Department have on duty throughout the year and during all office hours a bilingual English/Creole employee. On election day, a sufficient number of English/Creole employees should be provided to allow the intake of calls from voters who may have questions or be experiencing difficulties. Steps should be taken to let the community know that such bilingual assistance will be available.

Overcrowding and the Use of Back-Up Systems

√ The Coalition recommends the continued availability of back-up machines for future elections.

√ The Coalition recommends that paper ballots be available during future elections in the case of total machine failure, and that poll workers be allowed, with the authorization of the Supervisor of Elections, to use paper ballots to alleviate lines that have reached more than an hour in length.

Absentee Balloting

√ The Coalition recommends that the cost of mailing the ballot be clearly indicated on the postage section of the envelope. The Department of Elections' address should also be printed as the return address on absentee ballot envelopes. This will allow absentee ballots without sufficient postage to be returned to the County instead of the sender, thus preventing the loss of votes.

√ The Coalition recommends, as noted in Section 3, "Language Assistance," that absentee ballots be printed in a trilingual format that includes English, Spanish, and Creole each ballot.

Absentee Voting for Pretrial Detainees/Individuals with Misdemeanors

√ The Coalition recommends that the office of the Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections take the initiative to contact Miami-Dade County jails and arrange for the delivery, distribution, and pick-up of absentee ballots from eligible detainees who are registered to vote.

Maintaining Accurate Voter Rolls

√ The Coalition recommends that the Supervisor of Elections obtain the list of erroneously purged voters from the November 2000 elections and reinstate those voters to the rolls. The voters should then be mailed a letter to let them know that they have been reinstated. Returned letters should be kept for future records.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County Commission consider passing a resolution opposing the continued disenfranchisement of the hundreds of thousands of Florida citizens who have completed the period of supervision assigned for their felony convictions. The Coalition recommends that the County Commission take steps to support state legislative action to place before voters an amendment to the Florida Constitution to automatically restore voting rights after release from supervision.

Machine Calibration

√ The Coalition recommends that future voter education materials for the iVotronic machines include information about what a voter should do in the case of a calibration-type problem, e.g., see a poll worker immediately if you notice any movement of the screen or if the choices noted on screen do not match the choices you made.

√ The Coalition recommends that poll worker training materials make note of this potential problem, provide examples of how the problem might manifest itself, and give instructions on how to handle it.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County collect information about calibration issues that have occurred in other areas of the United States that use ES&S machines, particularly the iVotronics. This information should be collected from elections offices, newspaper clippings, and other third party sources.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County ask ES&S to report to the County on the calibration problems and the steps that are being taken to remedy them.

√ The Coalition recommends that, to the extent possible, the County conduct its own technical research into the source of the calibration problem.

Scheduling Municipal Elections

√ The Coalition recommends that the County accurately calculate the deadlines by which municipal elections must occur in order to accommodate programming needs for the general election. Municipalities should then be asked to follow procedures for amending their current primary election dates if those dates do not permit the general municipal and statewide elections to be placed on the same ballot.

Printing of Zero Report Tapes

√ The Coalition recommends that written and oral poll worker training be revised to instruct that zero report tapes be printed after set-up on the day before the election and in the morning of election day prior to poll opening.

Collecting of Lost Vote and Ghost Vote Data (Election Day and Early Voting)

√ The Coalition recommends that the County make reconciling the number of sign-ins versus the number of votes cast a routine part of the closing procedure for each precinct.

√ The Coalition recommends that procedures for tallying and recording these numbers be incorporated into poll worker training.

√ The Coalition recommends that at the end of each day of early voting, the number of votes cast on the machines be matched against the number of ballot variation forms collected, and that any differences in the totals be recorded and investigated. At the end of the day, the running totals (for that day and all prior days of early voting) should also be checked against the number of people marked on the computer as having voted early. Any discrepancies should be noted and checked against the ballot variation forms.

√ The Coalition recommends that procedures for tallying the numbers as described above be clearly laid out in training materials for poll workers who are to staff early voting.

√ The Coalition recommends that the County use the data collected to investigate possible instances of fraud.

Transfer of Early Voting Lists

- √ The Coalition recommends that lists of Monday early voters be delivered to all polling places no later than 6:30 a.m. on election day.
- √ The Coalition recommends that poll workers be provided precise instructions as to how these lists should be handled (i.e., should the voters be marked on the registration rolls?). The list should not simply be incorporated into the computer since doing so would mean that only the names of persons going through the Verification Specialist would be checked against the early voting list.
- √ The Coalition recommends that greater emphasis be placed on how poll workers at early voting sites are to record that an individual has voted.
- √ The Coalition recommends that as noted in Section 9, "Collecting Data," that the number of votes cast be reconciled with the number of ballot variation forms collected at the end of each day of early voting, and that running totals of each be kept throughout the two-week period.

Establishing Communication with Community Groups

- √ The Coalition recommends that a system of communication and responsiveness between County officials and community groups be incorporated into standard operating procedures for all elections, and that the designated community representative to accompany County officials on election day be given complete access to all meetings and events as they transpire.
- √ The Coalition recommends that the County Commission continue meetings of its Elections Oversight Task Force until such time as permanent reforms have been implemented.

Financial Auditing

- √ The Coalition recommends that an audit team be employed by the County to conduct a full financial review of the Elections Department and of the September 10th and November 5th elections in Miami-Dade County. The Coalition recommends that such a team be established for future elections.

Increasing Voter Turnout

- √ The Coalition recommends that early voting, especially with the inclusion of weekend voting and early morning/evening hours, be continued and made a regular part of future elections.
- √ The Coalition recommends that Miami-Dade County study the feasibility of election day registration in the State of Florida. The Coalition further urges that the County lobby for appropriate statewide legislative changes to either permit election day registration or to shorten the time between registrations and elections in Florida.
- √ The Coalition recommends that the County undertake voter registration campaigns at regular intervals throughout the year in order to balance out the possible diminishing effects of early voting on turnout.

Logistics

- √ The Coalition recommends that County officials examine ways in which the Miami-Dade Police Department's model for handling logistics can be used to establish a logistics component of the Elections Department. This new component must include meaningful civilian participation.

Creating a Board of Elections

The Coalition proposes that the County Commission establish a citizen's board of elections as a non-partisan agency, composed of civilians, elections experts, voting rights experts and County logistics experts, responsible for overseeing the office of the Supervisor of Elections, and for creating policies and procedures to ensure that all aspects of the electoral process, from voter registration to election results, are conducted and function in a fair, efficient and cost effective manner.