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Democracy Will Be”

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New Study: Lack of Planning in Virginia May Cause Election Day Problems Concerns Linger on Poll Booth Allocation Plans, Campus Polling Locations

Takoma Park, MD—October 20, 2008—Virginia voters could experience problems at the polls this Election Day due to lack of uniformity, insufficient preparation and limited access for students, according to a report released today by FairVote, a nonpartisan advocacy group.

FairVote surveyed 96 out of 134 Virginia city and county election officials and found that the state does not have a standardized method for allocating poll booths, which may cause long lines on Election Day. Long lines are often caused by an inadequate number of poll booths and have plagued voters, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods, in the past several election cycles. Researchers found that only 19 counties, out of the 96 surveyed (20-percent), plan to create a written poll booth allocation plan for their county. Creating a written plan gives voters an opportunity to review election preparedness and outlines contingency plans in the event of unexpected turnout on Election Day. One of the primary reasons given by county clerks for not creating written plans is that such preparation is not required by state statute.

Students hoping to vote on campus in Virginia may be disappointed. Thirty-two of the jurisdictions surveyed have a community college or university and of those, only 2 will have on-campus polling locations for November. This percentage of on-campus polling locations was by far the lowest of any state surveyed for this project. Students have traditionally been one of the least represented groups in the political process and Virginia’s lack of access to the polls for students could have a detrimental effect on their ability to participate in this year’s presidential election.

“The vast majority of jurisdictions we surveyed really make it difficult for students to participate in the election,” said co-author of the report, FairVote’s Adam Fogel. “Virginia has a long way to go in ensuring the standardization of booth and machine allocation across precincts and more transparency in the way local officials plan for Election Day. We can accomplish these goals by increasing funding for elections and better federal and state guidelines, including minimum standards for election preparedness.”

FairVote is a non-partisan electoral reform organization founded on a belief that democracy depends on respect for every voice and every vote. Part of FairVote’s Democracy SoS project, *Uniformity in Election Administration: A 2008 Survey of Swing State County Clerks—Virginia Edition* is the fourth in a series of reports published by FairVote this fall, designed to shed light on practices of county election administrators, as well as their interpretation and compliance with state law. The *Virginia Edition* is the final report in the state series, which also included reports on Missouri, New Mexico and Colorado. The *National Edition*, surveying election officials in counties with at least 500,000 residents in ten “swing states” will be released next week.

Read all of the state reports: <http://www.fairvote.org/sosresearch>

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