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# College Students Sue Dutchess County to Remove Barrier to Student Voting in Presidential Election

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Four college students have filed a federal class action lawsuit against the Dutchess County Board of Elections to protect the fundamental right to vote in next week's presidential election. The students — who attend the Culinary Institute of America, Marist College and Bard College — registered to vote and provided both street and mailing addresses, but had their applications denied by Republican Commissioner Erik Haight because they either did not provide the technical name of their dormitory buildings or their room numbers on their

applications. Approximately 100 students were similarly denied the right to register for the same reason.

The lawsuit seeks relief on behalf of the four individually named students and all similarly situated students. The students are represented by the New York Civil Liberties Union and the law firm of Lowenstein Sandler PC.

“Dutchess County has imposed an unconstitutional burden on the fundamental right of college students to vote as residents of their communities, where they are affected by the decisions of local officials and which they regard as their primary places of residence,” said NYCLU Legal Director Arthur Eisenberg. “The right to vote is preservative of all other rights in a democracy, and deserves the strictest constitutional protection possible.”

Earlier this month, the NYCLU urged Commissioner Haight to stop requiring students to provide the names of their dorms or their room numbers as it advances no legitimate interest, but Haight and the County refused to act.

The NYCLU is seeking emergency action from the court so that all students who seek to vote in Tuesday’s election who registered to vote may do so. The hearing on the NYCLU’s request for a preliminary injunction is scheduled to take place at 10 a.m. on Monday before Judge Karas in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District in White Plains, 300 Quarropas St.

“The president should be a representative of the people and you don’t know who the people are if they can’t vote,” said Alexis Roe, a 20-year-old political studies senior at Bard.

“This would have been my first time voting and I listened to all of the debates and read everything I could because this election is so important. It’s my right to vote and I feel like my basic rights are being taken away from me.”

“When I found out I wasn’t going to be able to vote because my room number wasn’t on my form, it sounded corrupt and I was very upset,” said Hans Kern, a 22-year-old Bard junior majoring in political studies. “The right to vote is the power I have politically as a citizen and I want to be able to exercise it.”

The NYCLU is asking the court to declare that the practice of denying college students the right to vote merely because they did not include a dorm name or room number unconstitutional, and to immediately take steps to ensure that students can vote on Tuesday by creating supplemental voter registration books of student names currently excluded from the registration books so when the effected people go to vote they will be able to.

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