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The Battle for the Ballot: Inside the Voting Rights Struggle in New York

The state continues to disenfranchise college students for partisan agendas. Bard College wants to challenge that.



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FAST RELIEF
OF OCCASIONAL
HEARTBURN*

*Pain relievers must be used to prevent heartburn from returning.



Students lining up to vote in the New York primary elections on April 19, 2016.

Last month, New York's voting laws came under national scrutiny as approximately 126,000 voters were purged from the rolls during the state's primary election, and thousands that claimed to have sent in their



registrations prior to the deadline -- one of the earliest in the nation -- were unable to vote due to processing delays.

For the April 19 presidential primary, unregistered voters needed to register 25 days before the primary, and the deadline for voters to change their party registration was 193 days before the election - October 9, 2015.

Members from both political parties were hurt by the draconian deadlines: Sanders fan Erica Garner, Eric Garner's daughter, and Ivanka Trump, Donald Trump's daughter, were both rendered unable to vote.

The struggle to vote doesn't stop with registration, however. Getting to the polls itself is a significant struggle in many areas. The voters at Bard College in Red Hook, NY, are no exception.

Most people think of apple picking, antiques, and scenic mountains when they think of the Hudson Valley. Instead, they should be thinking of corruption, disenfranchisement, and students risking their lives to vote and have their voices heard.

At Bard College, students and faculty have been urging the Board of Elections to relocate the polling station campus residents vote at for seven years.

The current District 5 polling site is at St. John the Evangelist Church in Barrytown, about two miles away from the College's campus on a busy, narrow road with no sidewalks and no public transportation. The small size of the church has led to long lines on Election Day: there are over 1125 registered voters in the district despite its recommended maximum capacity of 950 voters, and maps filed with the Board of Elections were found to have exaggerated the size and accessibility of the site. The current polling place also has limited handicap accessibility. There are stairs at the main entrance, and the entrance for disabled voters violates voter security procedure.

There's a simple solution: Move the District 5 polling place to the Bard College campus.

It's true that the polling station in Barrytown makes it easier for some voters who live in Barrytown - but Bard College students are 65-70% of the registered voter population options many Barrytown res



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transportation routes, and New York State law rules that, "each polling place designated, whenever practicable, shall be situated directly on a public transportation route." The proposed polling site on campus is also physically bigger, eliminating the concern of long wait times, and is more handicap-accessible.

A polling station at Bard College makes it easier for students, disabled people, and those without cars to vote -- the demographics that traditionally lack access to voting rights.

Seeing this, the town council unanimously passed a resolution advocating for the relocation of polling site, after two rejections in the prior seven years. The New York Civil Liberties Union endorsed the on-campus polling site. It seemed as if, despite increasing restrictions on voter rights across the country, students would finally win the fight against disenfranchisement.

But the county Board of Elections ultimately controls the decision, and there are two Election Commissioners (one Republican, and one Democrat) with veto power over the resolution.

Bard College has been ranked in the top 5 most liberal colleges in America by the Princeton Review and Business Insider multiple times. Assisting voters at Bard College means primarily assisting Democrats.

One of the Election Commissioners rejected the resolution. It isn't hard to guess who.

The deadline to confirm all polling sites in the county for the 2016 General Election was May 10. It's May 13, and because the commissioner would not confirm the site at Bard , **there is now technically no polling place in District 5.**

Democracy is based on the concept of one vote, one voice. Right now in the Hudson Valley, one party wants to increase its electoral competitiveness in one of the last swing districts in the nation by disenfranchising an entire demographic. They're fighting dirty. We have one thing to say in response to this: **We'll fight back.**



Eva-Marie Quinones '17 is co-head of the Election@Bard initiative (www.election.bard.edu), a r > **BuzzFeed**