

Bard students unhappy with voting hassle (with video)

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A STATE Supreme Court ruling that the votes of 12 Bard College students forced to file affidavit ballots on Election Day be counted without question has done little to quell concerns that college students were singled out by Republicans and others who want to prevent them from voting in local elections. Jonathan Becker, an associate professor of political science at Bard, said on Thursday that the college intends to “explore all avenues” available to protect its students from being targeted for such voter abuse in the future. “There is no doubt they were targeted,” Becker said. “The only people who were asked questions about their residency were students. “I recognize that some people don’t believe that students should vote in local elections, and many students choose not to,” Becker added. “But those who do chose to should be respected and should not be targeted.” Bard students were forced to vote on paper ballots following an Election Day ruling in a lawsuit brought by town of Poughkeepsie Republican Chairman Thomas Martinelli. Martinelli challenged the right to vote of roughly 60 Vassar College students because, he said, their addressees on Election Day were different than the addressed registered with the Board of Elections. State Supreme Court Justice James Brands directed the Dutchess County Board of Elections to require all voters who had moved from the address appearing on the voter registration rolls to vote using paper ballots. But in Tivoli’s District 5 polling place, a number of Bard students were prevented from voting on the machines as a matter of course. A video clip on YouTube depicts a dispute between elections officials and one student who wanted to cast his ballot on the District 5 machine, rather than by affidavit. The voter claims to be challenging on the basis of residency, but without providing a reason.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng4QF9InPds>

Unlike votes cast on voting machines, affidavit and absentee ballots are subject to challenge by political parties and can rejected for many reasons. Brands’ ruling was overturned about 8 p.m. on Election Day, and on Thursday, Supreme Court Justice James Pagonos ordered that the paper ballots cast by the 12 Bard College students be counted as if they were cast in the voting booth. County Democratic Elections Commissioner Fran Knapp called the lawsuit an “orchestrated attempt by the Republican Party to suppress voter turnout.” “I think it was a tool used on behalf of the (Martinelli) to intimidate college students and suppress voter turnout,” Knapp said. Republican Elections Commissioner David Gamache defended the actions of elections inspectors in both Tivoli and the town of Poughkeepsie. “There is nothing wrong with somebody in that case trying to protect the integrity of an election and challenging those people,” Gamache said. He rejected claims of voter suppression, challenging those making such claims to “produce one student who was denied the right to vote.” “I have no evidence that anything other than following the law and a court order was done at Bard or anywhere else in the county for that matter,” Gamache said.

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