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Downtown-Wooster Square Community Management Team

18 November 2016

President Tyisha Walker
New Haven Board of Alders
165 Church Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06510

Dear President Walker,

The Executive Board of the Downtown Wooster Square Community Management Team (CMT) respectfully requests that an Aldermanic Committee hold a hearing on the voting process in New Haven in 2016, with the goal of improving it going forward. Voting is a foundation of democracy. If the voting process is flawed, for example by extraordinarily long lines or incorrect information provided about voting location, it risks disenfranchising voters. Many people, because of family or work commitments, simply cannot unexpectedly spend two hours voting.

We are writing both because of our individual concerns with the voting process in New Haven over the past year and because of concerns we have heard from many residents of Downtown and Wooster Square. Some specific examples are listed below.

- In the primary elections, incorrect polling location information was mailed to residents of two voting precincts.

- Persistent problems with Election Day Registration (EDR) dating back to 2014, when more than 200 voters were turned away, have not been addressed. Election administrators failed to participate in SOTS-sponsored trainings, and EDR workers recruited at the last minute had not been properly trained. Long, chaotic EDR lines were experienced throughout the day, with the result that dozens of voters (50 according to the *New Haven Independent*) were turned away at 8:00 pm. Some of these individuals had already waited in line for hours. The situation would have been even worse had city employees not been recruited to assist at the last minute through an emergency intervention by the mayor and other officials outside the Registrars' office, suggesting that substantially more oversight is needed of decisions and protocols related to election administration in New Haven. Moreover, volunteer citizens who asked how they could help with the long lines that day were told there were no tasks they could help with.

- There were two hour waits at 200 Orange Street for much of the morning on November 8. This was a result of abysmal planning. There was one list with voter names when voting opened in the morning, for a ward with over 5,500 registered voters. The fact that the monitor for the location overslept did not help matters. There was no signage explaining what line people were to be in at 200 Orange Street, once a decision was made to photocopy the voter list and make two lines. And the lines were of significantly unequal lengths.

- At Conte / West Hills School, there were long lines at 8:00 am while many poll workers stood around eating bagels and not assisting.

- When a police officer arrived at City Hall to get more ballots because they were running out at Wilber Cross School, staff in the Registrar's Office did not know where the ballots or other critical supplies like colored making pens to annotate voter lists where kept. The staff told the police officer that they therefore could not help him until the Registrar returned, and they did not know where she was or how to contact her. This led to long lines at Wilbur Cross. And the confusion at Wilbur Cross was made worse by both Wards 9 and 10 voting there, without helpful signage, resulting in people waiting in the wrong line.

- Only three regular employees of the Registrar's Office plus a staff person from Corporation Council were available to answer the constantly ringing phones on November 8, resulting in many unanswered calls.

- The Registrar took over a week to post election results by Ward. It is interesting to note that 2,522 votes were cast in person for President in Ward 7, making it the highest voting ward in the city, and where there was just one list when the polls opened. Moreover, Yale students from Ward 1 were sent to 200 Orange Street to vote, while only 500 people voted in person at the Ward 1 voting location, the NHFPL. Not only did this skew the line lengths, but it also confused students, who weren't sure why some students voted in one location and some in another.

- When asked about the poor preparation, the Democratic Registrar was dismissive, seemingly not appreciating that as an elected official she is accountable to the public, especially when she failed in properly executing her responsibilities.

We hope that the Aldermanic Committee which is assigned this issue will hold a hearing in which:

- The elected Registrars are called to explain their planning processes and where they think improvements could be made;

- A discussion is held about whether the Registrar should be an appointed, perhaps regionalized position, rather than an elected position by town; and

- There is a discussion of opportunities for community volunteers, such as CMT members, to help with the voting process going forward, perhaps by helping create improved signage or serving as additional volunteer poll workers.

  Thank you for considering our request. We know how busy the Board of Alders is, but believe this is a critical issue to discuss further because efficient, fair voting is a foundation of democracy. Please let us know if you have any questions at info@dwscmt.net or 858-336-9614.

  Sincerely,

  The Executive Board of the Downtown Wooster Square Community Management Team