



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Voting Groups Warn Dutchess Executive, County Legislature Over Violation of Elections Law

*“Pattern of Discriminatory Actions” Noted*

**Poughkeepsie, New York, October 25, 2022**—Local student leaders of Democracy Matters, backed by The Andrew Goodman Foundation, League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region, and Dutchess Student Voting Coalition, warned Dutchess County today that the county Board of Election (BOE) is in “clear violation” of New York law in failing to designate an on-campus poll site at Vassar College in the Town of Poughkeepsie. The groups advised that further action may be taken if the Board of Elections does not “take corrective action immediately.”

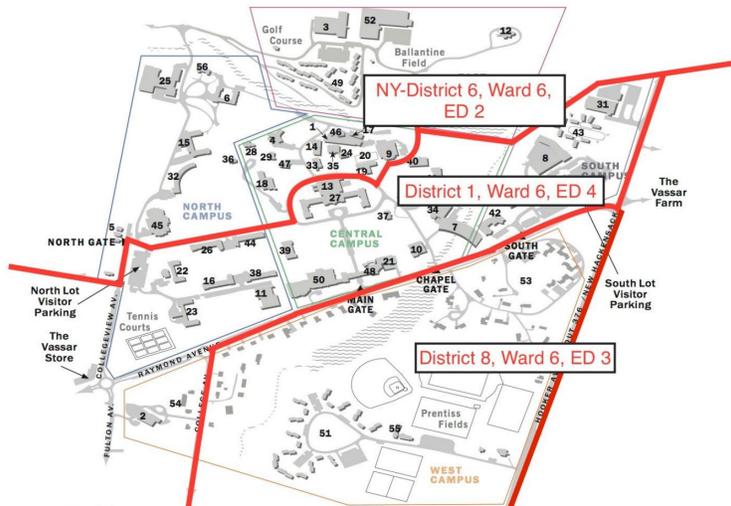
According to the letter, the Dutchess County Attorney gave the Board inaccurate guidance on the law, Election Law § 4-104, which mandates an August 1, 2022 deadline to designate poll sites on campuses with 300 or more residents registered to vote locally. The letter urges Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro and Chair of the County Legislature Gregg Pulver to “insist” that the Board of Elections act by the end of the week.

Sara Lawler, a senior at Vassar and a leader in the campus chapter of Democracy Matters, said, “The lack of an onsite polling campus really creates an additional burden to voting for Vassar students. Because most college students don't have cars, the lack

of an on campus polling station highly discourages Vassar students from voting by creating a barrier to access.” She noted that this “can easily be resolved” by the BOE. Currently, student voters in Ward 6, Election Districts 3 and 4 must walk off campus to the Dutchess County Water and Wastewater Authority, while those in Ward 6, Election District 2 must take a shuttle to an off-campus poll site on New Hackensack Road. County buses do not serve the latter location.

The letter endorses BOE Commissioner Hannah Black’s proposal to offer a central polling site at Vassar College for the November 8, 2022 election that provides voting access for all three election districts that currently cut through the campus, while keeping open all existing off-campus polling locations.

Vote at Vassar: County District, Town of Poughkeepsie Wards and Election Districts (EDs)



According to correspondence obtained by the organizations, Vassar College suggested multiple potential poll sites on campus and asked the Elections Commissioners to determine which was most suitable. While BOE Commissioner Black “sought to move the matter forward,” BOE Commissioner Erik Haight repeatedly refused to take action, stating as late as mid-September that a public hearing was “premature.” A September letter from the League of Women Voters to the BOE, urging action, has received no response.

The rights groups noted Haight’s “well-documented years-long ongoing efforts to suppress the youth vote in Dutchess County,” including disputes with Bard College over inadequate and unconstitutional polling facilities for campus residents. In various student voting rights lawsuits successfully brought by Bard College over the last decade, Haight’s refusal to act cost Dutchess County taxpayers over \$120,000 in legal fees.

According to Yael Bromberg, Esq., special counsel at The Andrew Goodman Foundation and a legal scholar of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment: “The Dutchess County BOE’s intransigence informed the change in state law due to decades of student voter suppression. There is now an express statutory mandate for on-campus polling locations in New York State. Commissioner Haight has again shirked his duties to act according to the law, and it is incumbent on county leadership to correct course.”

Dare Thompson, president of the League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region: “In this deeply disturbing and dangerously polarized time, voters expect their boards of elections to be a bulwark against selfish partisan games. We are beyond disappointed to see Dutchess County’s BOE not only violate the spirit of our voting laws but brazenly violate the law itself. Every one of us must demand better.”

Democracy Matters, a network of non-partisan campus chapters, fosters student civic engagement in order to create a more just and inclusive democracy. The Dutchess County Student Voting Coalition is a non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting student voting rights and encouraging electoral participation. The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan, grassroots organization working to protect and expand voting rights. The Andrew Goodman Foundation, named in memory of a 21-year-old Civil Rights advocate murdered in Mississippi during Freedom Summer 1964, works to protect student and youth voting rights across the United States.

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