

State review finds 'significant' irregularities in Baltimore election



Linda H. Lamone, Maryland's elections administrator, has said a number of votes went through that should not have been counted in Baltimore. "There will be precincts that cannot be explained," Lamone said. "We don't know what happened. The numbers simply don't match." (Luke Broadwater/Baltimore Sun video)



Luke Broadwater **Contact Reporter** The Baltimore Sun 8:08 PM

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/politics/bs-md-election-findings-20160519-story.html>

About 1,000 more votes were cast during Baltimore's primary election than there were voters who checked in at the polls, an ongoing state review has found.

State elections officials said Thursday that workers examining Baltimore's election have uncovered "significant" problems. They have found more than 450 provisional ballots that were not considered by election judges. And nearly 800 provisional ballots — given to voters whose eligibility is in question — were improperly counted before eligibility was verified, officials said.

Most of the problems were caused by untrained judges scanning ballots into the system that they shouldn't have, said Linda H. Lamone, Maryland's elections administrator. The state might not get to the bottom of every problem, she told the State Board of Elections.

"There will be precincts that cannot be explained," Lamone said. "We don't know what happened. The numbers simply don't match."

State officials ordered Baltimore's election results decertified last week amid concerns about voting irregularities. For several days, election workers from across the region have conducted a precinct-level review of the city's primary.

"The situation is still fluid," Lamone said. "As of [Thursday] morning, we were still finding documents."

She said she did not know how much longer the review would take.

Lamone sought the review when city officials — who had certified their election results last week — later reported they had found 80 provisional ballots that had not been analyzed. The state's review has found a total of 457 such ballots, she said Thursday.

Lamone said she suspected that many of those provisional ballots would be disqualified, but they needed to be evaluated anyway.



State officials said Wednesday their review of Baltimore's primary election was nearing an end, as they continued to investigate why votes outnumbered check-ins at the polls.

Nikki Baines Charlson, deputy administrator at the State Board of Elections, said she expected workers to finish the review...

(Luke Broadwater)

There were problems at precincts throughout the city, the review found. About 30 precincts had double-digit discrepancies between the number of votes and the number of voters who checked in. Three of Baltimore's 296 precincts had discrepancies of greater than 50 votes.

At the Shrine of the Sacred Heart School in Northwest Baltimore's 5th [City Council](#) District, there were 65 more votes than check-ins. At Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary School in West Baltimore's 11th City Council District, there were 56 more votes than check-ins. And at Arundel Elementary-Middle School in Cherry Hill, in the 10th Council District, there were 54 more votes than check-ins.

Lamone said she did not believe corruption led to the discrepancies.

"We saw no evidence of voter fraud whatsoever," she said.

But, she said, there is an obvious need to reform how Baltimore runs its elections after the switch to paper balloting this year.

"We're going to re-evaluate election judge training in Baltimore City," she said.

Armstead B.C. Jones Sr., the city's elections director, said Baltimore had not used paper ballots in nearly a century.

"We knew it would be an issue because it's new to us," he said.

Officials also found that the number of votes cast in some precincts was smaller than the number of voters who checked in.

Nikki Baines Charlson, deputy administrator at the State Board of Elections, said those numbers are attributed to so-called "fleeing voters," who get in line to vote but leave for various reasons.

"There are reasons for that to happen that are very normal," she said.

During the nearly hourlong presentation in Annapolis, state election board members — who are appointed by Gov. [Larry Hogan](#) — asked Lamone and Charlson if they saw similar problems in other jurisdictions. Charlson said the number of problems elsewhere was "very small."

The review of the city's election began behind closed doors Monday in a sprawling warehouse in West Baltimore, but elections officials agreed to open it up to the public after the mayoral campaign of [Sheila Dixon](#) filed an emergency court petition. Dixon, a former mayor, lost the Democratic primary to state Sen. Catherine E. Pugh by more than 2,400 votes.

At the State Board of Elections meeting, chairman David J. McManus Jr., a Republican, praised the decision to open up the process. He said he visited the warehouse and was impressed by the review.

"I would like to commend you on your decision to open that up to the public," McManus said. "It was thorough. People were working hard. I'm glad people got a chance to see that."

The Rev. Cortly "C.D." Witherspoon, an activist with the group Voters Organized for the Integrity of City Elections, or VOICE, said he was concerned how the extra votes might have affected the outcome of city elections, particularly in council races where a few hundred votes separated candidates.

"It's very troublesome," he said. "Clearly, there were over 1,000 votes where we really don't know whether these were Baltimore City-eligible votes. ... The citizens of this city were failed by the Baltimore Board of Elections."

Hassan Giordano, another VOICE activist, said the group is researching how to contest the April election results in court.

He said the group wants to petition the court to void the results and order a new primary in September. He expects VOICE to take action after the state's review is complete.

"We're ready to move forward," said Giordano, who was a volunteer with Dixon's campaign.

Jones said the members of VOICE have ulterior motives and shouldn't be taken seriously. He said they are working on behalf of failed candidates and hyping minor issues he is working to resolve.

"They're supporting candidates that didn't make it," Jones said. "It's not an agenda for the public. It's a personal agenda."

Meanwhile, officials in Hogan's office said they took issue with comments made by Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake on Wednesday that Hogan, a Republican, should provide more oversight of state-run elections.

Matthew A. Clark, a spokesman for Hogan, said Democrats in Annapolis are ultimately in charge of Lamone, a Democrat, because of legislation passed in 2005 that made it difficult for the governor's appointees to the Board of Elections to remove her from office. He said the mayor should contact Senate President [Thomas V. Mike Miller](#), House Speaker [Michael E. Busch](#) and Baltimore's delegation in the [General Assembly](#) if she "wants a change in the law or a change in the leadership at the state board."

"As it stands now, the State Board of Elections is an independent agency, and the governor's office has no authority over its operations," Clark said.

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