

About 1,650 ballots handled improperly in Baltimore election, state review finds



Pictures from the state's review of Baltimore's primary election.



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"This is worse than what anybody thought," activist says of Baltimore election review.

About 1,650 ballots cast in Baltimore's primary election were handled improperly, **a state review has found** — prompting some to question the validity of the election results.

The State Board of Elections concluded that 1,188 provisional ballots were inappropriately scanned into the vote tally on Election Day — without judges verifying that the voters were eligible — and 465 other provisional ballots were not considered. **The board's findings were released Monday.**

"In many ways, this is worse than what anybody thought," said the Rev. Cortly "C.D." Witherspoon, an activist with Voters Organized for the Integrity of City Elections, or VOICE. "Although we knew there was a problem, we did not know it was to this magnitude. The citizens deserve better."

State officials pledged to work with the city to ensure the November election goes more smoothly.

They ordered Baltimore's election results decertified this month amid concerns about voting irregularities. For several days, election workers from across the region conducted a precinct-level review of the city's primary — focusing on why there were about 1,000 more ballots cast than there were voters who checked into the polls on Election Day.



State elections officials said Friday that they continue to find irregularities in Baltimore's primary election as they complete their review.

Officials reported Thursday that about 1,000 more votes were cast during the April 26 primary in Baltimore than there were voters checked in at the polls....

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Officials concluded the problem involved provisional ballots —ballots given to people who show up to vote but whose names are not on the registered voters list for the primary election at that precinct. Those ballots are supposed to be set aside so officials can determine later if the voter was eligible. These voters would not appear on the check-in list of those registered. State officials believe that in some cases, these ballots were not set aside but were scanned into the total.

There were problems at precincts throughout the city, the review found. At only 75 of the city's 296 precincts did the number of voters who checked into the polls and the number of ballots cast match. At 11 precincts, there were at least 30 more ballots cast than voters who checked in.



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...

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The 1,188 unverified provisional ballots — given to voters whose eligibility was in question — will not be subtracted from the vote tally because there's no way to tell now if they should have been counted or not, officials said.

Armstead B.C. Jones Sr., the city's elections director, said the problem was that officials had to count regular and provisional ballots while "having 140,000 people voting." It was the first time in decades city voters were using paper ballots.

"It is what it is," he said. "It shouldn't have happened, but Baltimore City is not the only place where it happened."

State elections officials have said other jurisdictions did experience irregularities, but Baltimore's problems were much larger.

Jones said city elections officials plan to count the 465 outstanding provisional ballots this week and then recertify the election. In the mayor's race, state Sen. Catherine E. Pugh defeated Sheila Dixon, a former mayor, in the Democratic primary by fewer than 2,500 votes. Several City Council races were decided by a few hundred votes.

Once the results are recertified, candidates will have three days to call for a recount and a week to file an election challenge in court.

Charlie Metz, who trails City Council Vice President [Edward Reisinger](#) in the Democratic primary race for South Baltimore's District 10 council seat, said he is considering a challenge. The latest tally had Reisinger defeating Metz by 132 votes.

"There appears to be a significant number of votes in question — more than I had anticipated," Metz wrote in an email. "I believe the number is more than high enough to affect the outcome of my race.

"I am likely going to start asking for a new election to be held in September. I am probably shouting at windmills, but the errors are too significant not to demand an election free of errors."

Todd H. Oppenheim, a public defender who trails by about 300 votes in the race for Circuit Court judge, called the situation "disturbing."

During his campaign, "I saw the entrenched powers push back to maintain the status quo," Oppenheim said. "I can't help but to think this feeds into that same M.O."

Nikki Baines Charlson, deputy administrator at the State Board of Elections, said the state will help the city determine "what can be done to reduce the likelihood of this happening again."

"We'll be working with them to make some process improvements for the general election," she said.

Charlson said she believes many of the provisional ballots not yet considered will be ruled invalid. And, she noted, some of the provisional ballots improperly scanned into the Election Day tally might be valid.

She noted that election officials have not been able to determine exactly what went wrong at every precinct. "Based on everything the teams looked at, they just couldn't solve some of these puzzles," she said.

The issues raised in the state review are the latest in a series of irregularities that took place during Baltimore's April 26 primary.

Among the issues: Eight data files went missing for about a day after the election, and some polling precincts opened late. And 34 released felons — eligible to vote under a new law — received a city Board of Elections letter before the primary erroneously telling them they might not be able to vote.

Also, Jones said some elections workers did not show up to work on Election Day, causing officials to scramble.

"The issues we had on my end, to some degree, I can't control," he said. "We hire the people, and they don't show."

Retiring Councilman [Robert Curran](#) said he continues to be troubled by the election results, chiefly the improperly counted provisional ballots.

"It could make up differences in some council races," Curran said. "I am sure some of these candidates are wondering what's going on. Once the election's over, you want the election to be over, win or lose. You don't want it to be drawn out for two to three weeks."

Curran said he will use the council's budget hearings that start next week to seek answers. He said he wants to ask city election officials whether they had enough money to properly staff the primary and train workers. If not, he wants to know how future budget allocations could ensure a smoother election.

"We want to make sure that votes aren't counted that shouldn't be — that's a problem," Curran said. "I am not happy with the over-count. How did it happen?"

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