



OP-ED

As a young voter, I request early polling sites at Miami-Dade college campuses

BY MAYDEE MARTINEZ
MAYDEE.AM@GMAIL.COM

September 14, 2018 02:05 AM

College and university students in Miami-Dade County deserve an early-voting site on campus in time for the 2018 Midterm Election. Despite a statement from the Supervisor of Elections office that its list of early-voting locations has already been confirmed, Florida law permits sites to be

named up to 30 days prior to an election. That day is October 7, nearly a month away. I implore the county to reconsider the list of early-voting locations in Miami-Dade County before October 7 and add a site at one of our colleges or universities.

I am a proud Miami resident, graduate of Miami Dade College's Wolfson campus, and an alumna of The Andrew Goodman Foundation's Vote Everywhere program. The program, which includes a network of 56 college and university campuses in 24 states and Washington, D.C., aims to empower student leaders to register their peers to vote, get out the vote, and make voting more accessible on their campuses. In line with its mission to make young voices and votes a powerful force in democracy, The Andrew Goodman Foundation—along with the League of Women Voters and six college students—filed a lawsuit to make on-campus early voting in Florida a reality.

Last month, U.S. District Judge Mark Walker did not mince words when he granted a preliminary injunction, allowing Florida's Supervisors of Elections to place early-voting sites on college and university campuses. The injunction invalidated a 2014 opinion by Florida Secretary of State Ken Detzner, which banned early voting on campuses, and even confirmed that the state's interpretation of the law violated three U.S. Constitutional amendments. Specifically, age-based discrimination in the selection of polling locations is unconstitutional.

There is absolutely no excuse for Miami-Dade County when every other major county in Florida was able to accommodate early-polling locations on their flagship institutions' campuses. This growing list includes University of Florida, Florida State University, Florida A&M University, University of Central Florida, University of Southern Florida, and most recently Florida Atlantic University.

Enter Email Address

protected by reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

SIGN UP

When I was a student at Miami Dade College's Wolfson campus, I spent my days on campus getting my peers registered to vote. The students I encountered always had something to do. Oftentimes, students' day-to-day schedules are packed with academic, extracurricular, financial,

and familial responsibilities—not to mention the time it takes to navigate Miami’s traffic and public transportation woes. As any Miami resident knows, the traffic alone could serve as a deterrent to get out to vote on Election Day.

Early voting provides greater access to the polls for Florida’s voters, especially for students and other voters whose unique circumstances could prevent them from turning out on Election Day. In fact, Miami Dade College’s (MDC) public National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report indicated that voting early is an extremely popular option for college students. During the 2016 Presidential Election, a whopping 53.6 percent of MDC’s student voters cast their ballots early. And in 2014, students at Florida International University (FIU) were given the opportunity to exercise early voting on campus. Why not now?

Having a polling place on any of Miami-Dade County’s college campuses would greatly benefit the county’s students and our community. According to FIU student William Rivero, an early-voting location would attract more students to become politically involved. Rivero says, “I have a busy schedule. Having an early voting location on campus would eliminate the need for me to choose between attending class or heading to work and casting my vote.” Rebecca Diaz, Vote Everywhere Ambassador and student at Miami Dade College’s Wolfson campus agrees: “Placing a polling site right on campus will increase students’ access and our ability to exercise our democratic right to vote.”

Mayor Carlos Gimenez and Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections Christina White must reconsider the list of early-polling sites and at the very least add one location on a college or university campus. It is their responsibility to ensure that Miami-Dade County’s early-voting sites are accessible for everyone, including students, and that all voices are being heard in our democracy. Any excuses stating otherwise are unacceptable.

MAYDEE MARTINEZ LIVES IN MIAMI AND IS WORKING TO GET YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE POLLS IN NOVEMBER.





Martinez

SUGGESTED FOR YOU