



Testimony of Marleine Bastien, Executive Director
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And
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Before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Elections of the
Committee on House administration
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Madame Chairwoman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you on this vital issue "Voting Rights and Election Administration in Florida". My name is Marleine Bastien. I serve as the Executive Director of Family Action network Movement (FANM) formerly known as Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami/Haitian Women of Miami and FANM in Action.

Founded in 1991, Family Action Network Movement (FANM) formerly known as Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami, Inc./ Haitian Women of Miami is a private not-for-profit organization dedicated for the social, economic and political empowerment of Haitian women and their families in South Florida. Located in the heart of Little Haiti, FANM serves the needs of indigent and low-income women, and their families as well as victims of abuse, neglect, violence, discrimination, and racism. Since, 1991, FANM has championed and advocated for the rights of those who have been underserved, marginalized and disenfranchised. FANM's mission is to empower low to moderate income families socially, financially, and politically and to give them the tools to transform their communities.

FANM in Action mission is to work toward an inclusive, equitable, and just society for all. We train, educate, organize and mobilize grassroots citizens from the bottom up. We give them the tools to contribute to their own transformation, enfranchisement, and liberation. We encourage citizens' participation in political decisions and policies that impact their lives.

Florida long history of election woes is well known. According to “Florida, Georgia, North Carolina Still Purging Voters at High Rates,” from November 2012 to November 2014, the median purge rate in Florida was 3.6 percent. Between December 2016 and September 2018, Florida has purged more than 7 percent of its voters. Dade and Broward counties also have a number of zip codes that purged at higher rates (Morris & Brennan, 2018). Another issue is that Broward County and Palm Beach County have histories of being slow to count votes. Another concern is the design and length of the ballot.

As a community spokesperson who is privileged to serve as the Executive Director of Family Action Network Movement and FANM In Action, we want changes in the process of our elections with broad access to the vote. We want the process to be transparent to protect the integrity of the ballot and straightforward access to the polls. It is difficult for racial minorities and other groups to vote in Florida since these obstacles to voting are dominant such as polling location closures, inflexible work schedules, voter identification requirements, transportation issues, and language access issues.

FANM In Action ran a canvassing program combined with a communication strategy targeting close to 6,000, low-mid propensity, mid-high general activist score, Latino and Black naturalized immigrants in 2 areas of Miami-Dade: Little Haiti (33127, 33137, 33138, and 33150), and North Miami (33161, 33167, 33168, 33181).

We hired canvassers to go door to door, develop a Go out To Vote advertisement program to educate the voters about the importance of voting and mobilize them to go out and vote especially during early voting (preferably) and on Election Day. FANM In Action launched its signature campaign “Be my Vote” gear at encouraging those who cannot vote to recruit 5 U.S. Citizens voters to vote for them.

In November 2018, on Election Day, FANM in collaboration with New Florida Majority participated in the “Voter Protection Program”, where we sent more than 30 people to different election sites to monitor and identify the different problems and challenges at the poll. These are the different issues that we found:

- No translation services offered (Haitian Creole or Spanish).
- Issues with the voters' names.
- The design and length of the ballot.
- Wrong polling place.
- No provisional ballot offered.
- No assistance for people who don't read or write.
- Last minute change of polling sites.

- Long lines.
- Defective voting machines.

In my experience to support community voter education initiatives, I find that bilingual resources are one of the biggest issues in the Florida's election. In the 2018 midterm election, polling sites in Haitian concentrated areas lacked Haitian translators. This is unacceptable. The number of people with Haitian ancestry has increased much more than the growth of the overall population in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties in the past (Man, 2017). According to the Census Bureau, the Haitian-American population has grown to more than 300,000 in South Florida, 116,818 people of Haitian ancestry in Broward and 77,785 people of Haitian ancestry lived in Palm Beach County (Man, 2017). This is an important issue to consider. We must create a space for the diaspora community who want to become active participants in our democracy to vote.

To conclude, permit me to express my thanks for the honor of addressing this Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House administration. We share the prayer that Congress shall act to fix these issues now before the 2020 election for every voice to be heard. The election process so far excludes millions of Haitians, Hispanics, and Caribbean diaspora, many of whom live in the Haitian-American community I represent here today. The Subcommittee must raise this issue to the highest level of House and Senate leadership and pass laws that will protect and promote our sacred right to vote.

I want to reiterate that my testimony and comments today reflect upon my personal opinion, experience, and viewpoint. I am a nongovernmental witness. My statements here today are knowledgeable based on my experiences in the Florida election as a supervisor of GOTV staff, a committed and consistent poll watcher and an active voter in Florida.

Thank you very much.

Work Cited

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