



August 18, 2021

Monroe County Board of Commissioners  
100 W. Kirkwood Avenue  
Bloomington, IN 47401

Via E-mail: [pgithens@co.monroe.in.us](mailto:pgithens@co.monroe.in.us); [jthomas@co.monroe.in.us](mailto:jthomas@co.monroe.in.us); [ljones@co.monroe.in.us](mailto:ljones@co.monroe.in.us)

Re: Need for Expansion of Voter Services in Monroe County, Indiana

Dear Commissioner Githens, Commissioner Jones, and Commissioner Thomas,

My name is Ami Gandhi and I am a Senior Counsel at Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that has been working for the past 50 years to advance racial equity and economic opportunity for all. I lead our organization's efforts to protect voting rights in Illinois and Indiana. My family and I reside here in Monroe County, Indiana. I write today to express my concern for voting conditions in Monroe County and the need for expansion of voter services. I have appreciated learning about the challenges facing election officials and voters here and the need for an improved plan going forward regarding space and resources, especially during this important time of preparation for 2022 elections.

## **I. Background on Non-Partisan 866-OUR-VOTE Hotline**

The right to vote is fundamental to a healthy democracy. Chicago Lawyers' Committee's voting rights practice area works to reduce barriers to voting and civic participation, especially in communities of color and low-income communities. A major component of our work is Election Protection, the nation's largest non-partisan voter protection program, which operates the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline and supports companion lines at 888-VE-Y-VOTA, 888-API-VOTE, and 844-YALLA-US. Our staff and pro bono volunteers answer calls from Illinois and Indiana and have answered thousands of voter questions. Hoosiers called us in record breaking numbers during the 2020 primary and general elections, with many of them experiencing barriers to registering and voting.

In addition to our Election Day work, we are proud to partner with Common Cause Indiana, the Indiana State Conference of the NAACP, and national Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on a number of initiatives to strengthen voter access, including litigation challenging Indiana state laws that undermine the fundamental right to vote. This past spring, we successfully advocated against Indiana bills placing unlawful and unjustified burdens on voters.

## **II. Experiences Reported by Monroe County Voters**

Calls to the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline range from informational questions to problems faced in the voting process. When voters and election authorities have strong communication, problems are more likely to be solved real-time during the election. Below is a brief summary of issues reported to 866-OUR-VOTE by Monroe County community members between 2016 and 2020:

100 N. LASALLE STREET • SUITE 600 • CHICAGO, IL 60602 • 312-630-9744 (TEL) • (312) 630-1127 (FAX)

[WWW.CLCCRUL.ORG](http://WWW.CLCCRUL.ORG)



- Confusion about voter registration status, such as status showing up as inactive;
- Questions about absentee ballots, such as requesting to vote by mail, ballots getting lost, or ballots getting delayed in the mail;
- Questions about in-person polling place locations including from people who go to the wrong polling place;
- Questions from people who have recently moved;
- Questions about provisional voting;
- Issues with early voting;
- Incorrect notification of signature mismatch;
- Questions about voter identification requirements;
- Disability access and health issues, including calls from people with mobility issues or autoimmune disease;
- Problems with very long lines; and
- Inquiries from college students wondering where they are permitted to register and vote.

In particular, during the midterm election on November 6, 2018, we received multiple calls from voters whose polling places had run out of ballots. Up to half of the polling places in Monroe County suffered from ballot shortages in the afternoon due to heavy voter turnout. Following Clerk Browne's filing of a request to extend polling-place hours, the Monroe County Circuit Court ordered polling-place hours extended county-wide to ameliorate problems of long lines and insufficient ballots at polling sites.<sup>1</sup>

### III. Conclusion

Leaders in Indiana should be improving voting conditions instead of perpetuating the status quo. The restrictive election system in Indiana poses particular threats to people of color, including Black, Latino, and Asian American citizens. Now is the time to find creative ways to accommodate the increasing number of citizens who are taking an interest in voting, rather than to be caught unprepared when voters want to participate in our democracy.

As a voting rights attorney and a resident of Indiana, I am deeply concerned about the disenfranchisement that Hoosiers will face in 2022. The time is ripe for local communities to invest resources to strengthen election systems, such as planning appropriate space for voters and election administrators alike. Thank you for the opportunity to share input today. Please feel free to contact me at [agandhi@clccrul.org](mailto:agandhi@clccrul.org) if you would like to discuss.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ami Gandhi".

Ami Gandhi, Senior Counsel, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

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<sup>1</sup> Becca Costello, *Monroe Co. Keeping Polls Open Til 7PM After Delays Due to Ballot Shortages*, *Indiana Public Media* (Nov. 6, 2018), <https://indianapublicmedia.org/news/several-monroe-co.-polling-places-run-out-of-ballots-as-turnout-soars.php>.