

## For Immediate Release

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### SEVERAL BATTLEGROUND STATES NOT PREPARED FOR VOTER TURNOUT

**(October 9, 2008, Washington DC)**— According to research conducted by Advancement Project, a national leading voter protection organization, several battleground states are not prepared to meet the challenge of administering the general election on November 4<sup>th</sup>, where turnout will be unprecedented. To assess, and help ensure, the nation's readiness for the November general election, Advancement Project obtained public records and other public information on the allocation, at the precinct level, of voting machines (or, in the case of jurisdictions that use optical scan machines, voting privacy booths) and poll workers in the following states: Florida, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

Advancement Project's research on the 28 counties and cities has resulted in three key findings:

1. In many jurisdictions, the number of voting machines, privacy booths, and poll workers will likely be insufficient to accommodate all those who may turn out to vote on November 4, 2008. This will likely result in extremely long lines at the polls and "lost" voters unless these problems are addressed beforehand.
2. Machines, privacy booths, and poll workers have been mis-allocated in many jurisdictions, which will likely result in some precincts within a jurisdiction having long lines due to insufficient resources while neighboring precincts have an efficient Election Day because they have been provided ample numbers of machines, privacy booths, and poll workers.
3. In some jurisdictions, the allocation of polling place resources is likely to have a disproportionate impact on communities of color. In other words, there will be fewer voting machines or poll workers per voter in high minority precincts than in low minority precincts.

"People are excited about voting in this election, registration and turn out will be up, which is great for our democracy," said Judith Browne-Dianis, co-director, Advancement Project. "However, many election officials are under-resourced or have misallocated their resources. If they do not prepare adequately for the potential turnout, what could be the greatest collective exercise in democratic participation in our nation's history be stained by government failure."

#### Methodology

Advancement Project applied machine and poll worker allocations to three potential turnout estimates for each county or city (ranging from most conservative to least conservative):<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We were more conservative for jurisdictions that had high turnout levels among "infrequent voters" in 2004; for those jurisdictions, we eliminated all additions for "infrequent voters."

- Scenario One – 5% more “new voters” and “infrequent voters” turn out.
- Scenario Two – 10% more “new voters” and “infrequent voters” turn out.
- Scenario Three – Among Whites, 10% more “infrequent voters” and 15% more “new voters” turn out. For minorities, 15% more “infrequent voters” and 25% more “new voters” turn out.

Below are a few highlights of Advancement Project’s research:

### **Allocation of Voting Machines**

#### *Virginia*

Most of the Virginia cities —Alexandria, Fairfax County, Newport News, Norfolk, Richmond, and Virginia Beach—Advancement Project examined, are among the worst resourced and ill-prepared of all jurisdictions we examined. For example:

- Each jurisdiction has some precincts that appear unlikely to be able to accommodate potential voters within the standard 13-hour Election Day.
- In some jurisdictions, the majority of precincts face the prospect of extremely long lines unless more resources are allocated.
- Based on the turnout estimates created by Advancement Project, some precincts would require well over 20 or even 30 hours to process all voters.

Essentially, this would mean that if every voter in the precinct arrived at 6:00 a.m. when the polls opened, many voters would stand in line all day and would still not cast a ballot by 7 p.m. At five minutes per voter, the situation appears even more alarming.

#### *Pennsylvania*

In Pennsylvania, Advancement Project estimated potential turnout at three different levels for Berks, Montgomery counties and Philadelphia, to assess the impact of polling place resource allocations. Based on these estimates and the actual numbers of machines and poll workers assigned to different precincts, Advancement Project has concluded that many jurisdictions appear severely under-resourced and ill-prepared.

For example, using an average voting time of just two minutes, under our scenarios there are precincts in each of the three counties that would be unable to accommodate its voters in a standard 13-hour election day. Indeed, the majority of precincts in Berks and Montgomery Counties would not be able to process all of its voters in 13 hours, and there are precincts in all those counties as well as Philadelphia that could potentially need more than 20 or even 30 hours to process all voters at current resource levels.

“These jurisdictions are just not prepared. States, counties, cities and their election officials must act now to ensure a smooth and efficient Election Day,” continued Browne-Dianis.

## **Allocation of Poll Workers**

Adequate allocation of poll workers is critically important to the efficient administration of elections. Poll workers are charged with assisting voters through the process, which is even more important in an election with so many new voters.

### *Ohio*

The allocation of poll workers in the six Ohio counties—Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Montgomery, and Summit—reviewed in this report is troubling. Our findings suggest that the number of poll workers will be inadequate to handle the expected turnout of voters in the upcoming November election. Moreover, the allocation of poll workers is not equitable across precincts, which will result in some communities receiving less assistance at the polls than others.

For example, using estimated turnout under Scenario One, the ratio of voters to poll workers ranges widely in many counties, including from 28 to 407 for Franklin County. Using estimated turnout under Scenario Three, the ranges are even wider, such as 0 to 404 for Cuyahoga County.

Moreover, there are racial disparities evident in the allocation of poll workers in some other counties. For example:

- In Franklin County, OH, there were 11% more voters per poll worker in high minority precincts (greater than 75%) than in low minority precincts (less than 25%).
- In Cuyahoga County, OH, there were 11% more voters per poll worker in high minority precincts (greater than 75%) than in low minority precincts (less than 25%).

Though voting machine and privacy booth allocations have not been released in most of the Ohio counties, there is already reason for concern. For example, if Lucas County allocates its machines as it did in the 2008 Primary (and it appears not to have added any machines), the number of voters per machine under our most conservative turnout estimate would range from 40 to 241, indicating that voters will likely encounter widely varying access to resources unless there is a re-allocation prior to the November 2008 election.

Furthermore, a report on machine allocation for the 2008 General Election prepared for the Franklin County Board of Elections by industrial and systems engineers from Ohio State University indicated that, even with the addition of machines, the wait times in many precincts could exceed three hours. They also stressed that if appropriate steps were not taken, the waiting lines will likely affect African-Americans more than other voters.

### *Virginia*

Allocation of poll workers is just as troubling as it is for the allocation of machines/privacy booths. Many jurisdictions appear to lack an adequate number of poll workers and, indeed, these allocations often seem largely arbitrary. For example, using estimated turnout under Scenario One, the ratio of voters to poll workers ranges widely in many counties, including: from 60 to 306 in Newport News; from 84 to 315 in Virginia Beach, and from 62 to 246 in Fairfax County. The ranges are even wider under Scenarios Two and Three. In precincts

that have an inadequate number of voting machines or privacy booths, high ratios of voters to poll workers will further stress Election Day operations and likely create further delays in voting.

Advancement Project recommends that the State Board of Elections take the following steps: (1) appoint an Election Day resource ombudsman to identify additional resources for under-resourced precincts; (2) locate and deploy additional polling place resources for use on November 4, 2008; (3) direct the counties to re-allocate existing resources in a more equitable fashion; and (4) require the use of paper ballots in stressed precincts, and (5) consider extending the polling hours.

### *Pennsylvania*

There is also an incredible range of voters per poll worker in both Montgomery and Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, while the average number of voters per poll worker under Scenario One is 102, it ranges across precincts from 1 to 401. Under Scenario Three, the average is 109, but the range is even greater: from 1 to 449.

In Montgomery, there are many more voters per poll worker – 209 under Scenario One – but the ranges are even greater than in Philadelphia; from 52 to 532 in Scenario One, and from 56 to 570 under Scenario Three. This indicates that Montgomery is comparatively under-resourced with respect to poll workers, and that both Montgomery and Philadelphia should re-allocate poll workers so that they are more equitably distributed across precincts.

## **Disproportionate Impact on Communities of Color**

### *Virginia*

In some of the jurisdictions the allocation of polling place resources will likely have a disproportionate impact on communities of color. In other words, there will be fewer voting machines or poll workers per voter in high minority precincts than in low minority precincts. Such mis-allocations may violate the Voting Rights Act. For example, using actual registration figures as of July 31, 2008:

- In Richmond, there are 20% more voters per machine in high minority precincts (greater than 75% minority) than in low minority precincts (less than 25%).
- In Virginia Beach, there are 11% more voters per machine and voters per poll worker in precincts that are 25-50% minority than in low minority precincts (less than 25%).
- In Alexandria, there are 26% more voters per poll worker in precincts that are 25-50% minority than in low minority precincts (less than 25%).

“With a little less than a month before this historical election, there is little time left to fix this problem but election officials must act. Voters should not be discouraged but be steadfast in their commitment to vote,” concluded Browne-Dianis. “Of course, it is in the best interests of our democracy to have the highest voter participation possible. Election officials have a legal obligation to address these resource deficiencies to allow voters to cast a ballot without undue burden.”

If you would like to receive the comprehensive data in the form of charts and maps please contact Sabrina Williams @ 202/728-9557 or [swilliams@advancementproject.org](mailto:swilliams@advancementproject.org)

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*Advancement Project's core purpose is to develop, encourage, pioneer and widely disseminate innovative ideas and models that inspire and mobilize a broad national racial justice movement so that universal opportunity and a just democracy are achieved.*

*The organization was founded on the principle that structural racism can be eliminated and a racially just democracy may be attained through multi-racial collective action by organized communities. Advancement Project's founding team of veteran civil rights lawyers and communications experts have established an organization that informs community organizing with careful legal analysis and strategic communications campaigns. We develop community-based solutions based on the same high quality legal analysis and public education campaigns that produced the landmark civil rights victories of earlier eras.*