Proskauer

Proskauer Helps Callers Navigate Complicated Voting Landscape in Runup to 2024 Election

Proskauer For Good on **October 31, 2024**

As Proskauer's Pro Bono Counsel, Michelle Moriarty not only manages the pro bono program but also participates in some of the Firm's most impactful pro bono projects. She has volunteered on the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law's Election Protection hotline for years and will be a hotline captain for this year's election cycle. Michelle recently caught up with associate Elliot Stevens, who will serve as one of Proskauer's hotline leads this year, and associate Matt Westbrook, another hotline captain, to discuss their experiences fielding voter calls over the last few weeks.

MM: Why did you two get involved in Election Protection?

ES: I have been volunteering with the Election Protection hotline since 2018, back when it was an in-person hotline and we all sat in a giant conference room at the Firm answering calls together. I found it an incredibly interesting, impactful way to get to know my colleagues at the Firm and to help voters and have volunteered for every election since. Through this work, I have heard from so many people who are just trying to figure out how to vote, but the complex web of rules and requirements, which vary by state, make it extremely difficult to do so.

MW: Yes, you can really see the impact of the hotline in real-time. We get so many calls from voters who just want to make sure that they vote properly and that their vote can be counted. They understand that their vote is their voice in government, and they want to use it! And it is disheartening to see how difficult it can be for people to navigate this process.

MM: I completely agree. There are so many complexities involved in voting, particularly if you are someone who has moved, has trouble getting to the polls, has trouble using the internet to register, didn't receive your mail-in ballot, etc. For instance, many people don't know that in New York, if you requested and received an absentee ballot but change your mind and decide to vote in person, you must bring your absentee ballot with you so it can be destroyed on the spot in order to cast an in-person vote.

MW: We are seeing some really disheartening issues. For example, we received multiple calls from one state's residents who were recently naturalized and told at the naturalization ceremony that they would be placed on the voter registration list. However, when they went to check their registration, they were not listed as registered, and now the registration deadline has passed. It is heartbreaking – these are people who have taken every possible step to ensure that they can have a say in their government, and now, through no fault of their own, they won't be able to vote in the 2024 election.

ES: I have also seen some disturbing reports regarding discrimination on my shifts. We had callers reporting that voters of particular races were being questioned about their residence, and even made to sign documents about their residence, where voters of other races were not. That is the kind of report that we escalate to the Lawyers' Committee immediately so they can work with their partners on the ground to address it.

But on the flip side, so many of the calls are extremely rewarding. It is gratifying to be able to help voters successfully navigate the voting process. There are so many complicated rules that vary by state, and Election Protection does a really nice job collating and distilling that information for volunteers so that we can in turn help voters. To provide just a few examples, we have helped people confirm their registration, identify their voting location, figure out how to vote early, fill out and return their absentee ballots, ensure they can vote even if they will be out of town on Election Day, and help make sure their children attending college in other states are properly registered.

MM: And callers are incredibly grateful when we can help them sort out tricky issues and make sure their vote counts!

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