

KATHY CASTOR
11TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
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POLICY COMMITTEE

ASSISTANT WHIP-AT-LARGE



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0911

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
317 CANNON BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3376

DISTRICT OFFICE:
4144 NORTH ARMENIA AVENUE
SUITE 300
TAMPA, FL 33607
(813) 871-2817
www.castor.house.gov

September 15, 2008

The Honorable Deborah Clark
Election Service Center
Starkey Lakes Corporate Center
13001 Starkey Road
Largo FL 33773

Re: Expansion of Early Voting Locations

Dear Supervisor Clark:

I write to urge you to open additional early voting locations for Pinellas County voters for the 2008 General Election. Projections from all parties point to historic turnout levels this year. Early voting is vital to ensure that voters do not wait in long lines on Election Day. There are only three early walk-in voting locations in Pinellas: the County Courthouse on Court Street in downtown Clearwater, in the Election Service Center at 13001 Starkey Road in Largo, and in the County Building in downtown St. Petersburg.

The lack of early voting sites presents a real challenge to Pinellas County voters. For a resident of East Lake, for example, the closest early walk-in voting location is an hour-long round-trip across and down the county to the courthouse in downtown Clearwater. Many of our constituents in South St. Petersburg who do not own a car face an inconvenient bus or expensive taxi ride. Far from helping folks exercise this all important and hard won right, the paucity of early voting sites will make it such an ordeal that it is not a realistic alternative.

Pinellas lays far behind other urban counties in Florida. Counties with comparable population sizes have more early voting locations for their residents, with Hillsborough County opening 13 sites and Orange County opening 10. In our area, Pasco County will open 7 early voting sites and Polk County will open 6. A list of other urban counties is attached as well.

The St. Pete Times has quoted your office as saying that if anyone wants to vote early and doesn't want to undertake the journey to one of the three sites, they can request a mail ballot and vote entirely by mail. First, state law mandates that both kinds of early voting be offered in a convenient way to the voters of Florida. And, second, the odd amount of postage compounded by tough economic times might make a successful mailing difficult.

The truth is that failing to expand early voting locations in Pinellas effectively removes early walk-in voting as a reasonable option for most county residents. Even if this did not violate the spirit of the early voting law, it would be the wrong result, as nothing is more basic in a democracy than the right for our constituents to register their opinion as to our continued tenure, especially on incumbents like you and me. I am sure that upon reflection you would agree any chilling of this right has no place in Pinellas County, in Florida or in America.

I strongly urge you to expand the number of early walk-in voting locations in Pinellas.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
U.S. Representative
Florida, District 11

Urban County Early Voting Sites

| County | Number of Early Voting Sites ¹ | Population ² |
|--------------|---|-------------------------|
| Osceola | 5 | 172,493 |
| Alachua | 3 | 217,955 |
| Leon | 4 | 239,452 |
| Collier | 7 | 251,377 |
| Marion | 6 | 258,916 |
| Pasco | 7 | 344,765 |
| Lee | 5 | 440,888 |
| Volusia | 5 | 443,343 |
| Polk | 6 | 483,924 |
| Duval | 15 | 778,879 |
| Orange | 10 | 896,344 |
| Pinellas | 3 | 921,482 |
| Hillsborough | 13 | 998,948 |
| Palm Beach | 8 | 1,131,184 |
| Broward | 17 | 1,623,018 |
| Miami-Dade | 20 | 2,253,362 |

¹ Information gathered from the websites of each county's Supervisor of Elections

² <http://www.stateoflorida.com/Portal/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=95>