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### Report demands better training of poll workers

Lack of provisional ballots leads complaints

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**STATEHOUSE BUREAU**

New Jersey needs to better train poll workers and track Election Day complaints to make sure voters' rights are preserved, according to a report that will be released today by the American Civil Liberties Union and the League of Women Voters.

The two groups studied voter problems during the November presidential election, fielding more than 700 phone calls from people who had trouble casting a ballot. Their report concludes: "New Jersey still has a long way to go before our elections benefit from the best systems and practices."

"We think the problems are widespread and systemic," said Deborah Jacobs, executive director of the ACLU in New Jersey. "I think that there is a lot more that can be done to demonstrate that there is a concern that every vote is being counted."

Jacobs said most of the complaints were due to poll worker performance, such as failure to provide a provisional ballot or giving voters poor information. She said the state needs to set higher, more uniform standards for poll workers.

"Poll workers are the front line to the voters," Jacobs said. "Going to a two-hour training session is not enough."

Anne Rauch Nicolas, executive director of the League of Women Voters, said poll workers are not trained the same way, even though the state has guidelines.

"Poll worker training is done by county and so it does differ between counties," said Nicolas.

The ACLU and the League of Women Voters, which began monitoring state elections in 2004, applauded some changes made by the Division of Elections, such as publishing better voting guides and pushing officials to respond quicker to problems on election day.

Bob Giles, director of the Division of Elections, would not comment on the report. Laurie Brewer, a spokeswoman for the public advocate, which has been monitoring voter problems, also declined to comment.

The ACLU's report said that the state has been providing provisional ballots -- issued to voters when there is a question about eligibility -- for 12 years but that there is still confusion over when and why they should be used. "Poll workers still resist distributing them," read the report.

The ACLU found at least 176 people were turned away at the polls because their names were not listed as registered and they were not offered such ballots.

The report said the state has not fully complied with the 1993 National Voter Registration Act, which requires that residents be allowed to submit voter registrations at state motor vehicle agencies. Although

the report said progress had been made, it cited 180 registration problems at motor vehicle offices.

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