



**Rutgers—New Brunswick  
NJPIRG Student Chapters  
Fall 2019 Referendum Report**

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### **Members of the Oversight Committee**

The 2019 NJPIRG Referendum Oversight Committee was comprised of a representative from the Douglass Governing Council (DGC), Engineering Governing Council (EGC), Mason Gross Student Governing Association (MGSGA), Pharmacy Governing Council (PGC), Rutgers Business Governing Association (RBGA), and the Rutgers University Student Assembly (RUSA). This is per Rutgers Policy 10.3.3. Section VI. B. which states, “the student government of each voting unit where a referendum will be held shall appoint one representative to an Oversight Committee”. Though I reached out to the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and the SEBS Governing Council (SGC), neither governing council appointed a representative to our committee.

### **Meetings of the Oversight Committee**

*October 4th 2019*

The budget for the referendum was approved, but the original ballot language “Do you support the continued existence of the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group Student Chapters (NJPIRG) for the next three years, funded through an \$11.20 per semester waivable fee (\$5.50 per semester for part-time students)?” was revised and submitted to Dr. Mena for reapproval. The Oversight Committee’s rationale was that the language was misleading as the referendum was not about whether students “support the continued existence” of the petitioning organization, rather it was about whether the waivable fee would be applied to the term bill. Dr. Mena rejected our proposed language, “ Do you support the continued existence of an \$11.20 per semester waivable fee on the term bill (\$5.50 per semester for part time students) to fund NJPIRG Student Chapters for the next 3 years?” as too confusing and unclear as to where the money was going. Dr. Mena’s proposed rewording, "do you support funding NJPIRG student chapters through an \$11.20 per semester waivable fee for the next 3 years (\$5.50 for part time students)?" was approved by the Oversight Committee on October 8th.

*October 9th 2019*

The committee approved polling locations to be open 8am -9pm. In addition, the following polling locations were approved on Livingston campus: the Plaza bus stop, the Quads bus stop, the Student Center bus stop, between Lucy and Tillet, Livingston Circle, the Business Building, the HR building, the Quads, Beck Hall, between the student center and the dining hall, Livingston Plaza, Livingston Apartments B and C, and Lynton.

On Busch, the back of the student center, the student center bus stop, the ARC bus stop, the Science building bus stop, hill center, Library of Science and Medicine, Graduate Psychology Building, Material Science Building, Werbling Back Entrance, BAMM, BEST, Biel Apartments, Werblin Front Entrance, Busch Suites bus stop, and SERC front entrance were approved. Freshman dorms and Physics Lecture were not approved as they were deemed too vague of a location.

On College Ave, the Voorhees Mall outside Scott Hall, Hardenberg right entrance, the Yard, the Academic building (Seminary Place entrance), Honors College Courtyard, Tacoria, Student Center, SAC, Voorhees/Murray, Bishop Quads, SCI Entrance, School of Social Work Building, Barnes and Nobles, Easton Ave Apartments, the Alexander Library, the Graduate School of Education Building, the Mason Gross/Bloustein Building (off campus), and Brower Steps and the Rockoff Hall Bus Stop were approved; whereas the Vue was not approved as it was deemed virtually the same as the Barnes and Noble entrance.

On Cook/Douglass, College Hall, the College Hall bus stop, the Douglass and Cook Student Center, the food science bus stop, the Bettenbender plaza, the Art History building, the New Gibbons bus stop, the Cook/Douglass Gym entrance, the Hickman/Lorrie bridge, Neilson Dining Hall, the Red Oak Lane bus stop, the entrance of Hickman, the Kathleen Ludwig entrance, Biel Road bus stop, Eagleton, the Katzenbach bus stop, and the Henderson bus stop were approved. The farm was not approved as well as Mason Gross. The petitioning organization changed their request from "Mason Gross" to the Bettenbender plaza which was approved.

For all locations, the Oversight Committee deemed it was NJPIRG's responsibility to remove all propaganda from electronic boards and posting places. This was based off of the knowledge that in the Spring Daily Targum Referendum, the petitioning organization had indoor polling locations near TVs which displayed language in favor of the school newspaper. It should be noted that the majority of these polling locations were never used (the Oversight Committee received weekly updates of what polling locations were open, when they were open, and who was working at the location).

10.3.3's language which states in Section XII B) "The student must provide his or her name and Rutgers University net ID number, and school of enrollment on the front of the envelope in the space provided" was also clarified. The envelope provided by the Referendum Coordinator only asked for students RUID number whereas the language in the policy is unclear whether RUID, NETID, or both are required. After calling the office of compliance it was deemed that the envelope with only RUID would be permissible.

*October 16th 2019*

The language on the voting boxes for the first few days of the referendum stated, "A voting-eligible student can report problems or concerns regarding the conduct of voting, or violations of any regulations or procedures, through processes detailed in Section XIV 'Appeals Procedures' of Rutgers Policy Section 10.3.3. Policy on Special Student Organization Funding." The problem with this language is that it directs students to the policy, but the policy fails to tell students how to reach the Oversight Committee. Thus, I set up an email account and the Oversight Committee ruled that the appeal language must be changed to "According to Section XIV "Appeals Procedures" of Rutgers Policy Section 10.3.3 Policy: "Any member of the Rutgers University community may challenge a referendum's validity for improprieties at any point during the referendum process through an appeals procedure. All alleged infractions must be reported in writing to the Oversight Committee within ten class days of when the challenger becomes aware of the alleged infractions". Email [RUoversightcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:RUoversightcommittee@gmail.com) to file an appeal."

At this meeting, I encouraged members of the committee to publicize polling locations for the referendum or promote student involvement in the referendum. Though the Oversight Committee is neutral, a higher voter participation better reflects the will of the student body, which is in line with the mission statement of our governing councils. Thus, I wrote a bill and sent it to the RUSA PR committee asking them to cosponsor it. At the Public Relations committee meeting, the chair was not there, so I explained the bill to the committee. At first, they did not like it, but I explained that it was just about posting information on the locations of polling locations, to which there was consensus that they liked the bill. When I talked with the chair of the committee the next day, he told me that he had had a conversation with the committee and that PR did not want to work on the initiative. I am not sure where or when this conversation took place that they decided not to sponsor this initiative, since I attended their meeting. For the 2019 Daily Targum Referendum, the RUSA PR committee sponsored a near identical bill to support the advertisement of the referendum. Thus, it was very disappointing that RUSA decided not to help advertise polling location and the referendum, especially in a matter so important to students and when RUSA in the past has supported student participation in government elections by sponsoring shuttle buses to polling sites.

#### *November 13th 2019*

The Cook and Douglass Student Center were approved for locations of tabulations. The method proposed and approved for tabulation was a spreadsheet on which we recorded students RUID's and vote (later this method was changed).

### **Rulings and Opinions**

*Online Voting* - NJPIRG was under the impression that online voting meant that they could not receive daily updates on how many students had voted in each division. This information was wrong; however, by the time I informed them of this, they were already set on paper ballots. This made tabulation much more tedious as well as adding to the work of the Referendum Coordinators to validate votes by hand and ensure there were no repeat votes. In the future, I would recommend the implementation of online voting. The petitioning organization also did not want to use online voting because they were unsure how this would affect the limit on them advertising pro NJPIRG information within 50 ft. More clear guidelines within 10.3.3. would help clarify this issue for all parties.

*Clarification of Petitioning Organization* - On October 25th, I received a message from my friend who was a poll worker that the person whose shift was after his said that they were a member of Massachusetts PIRG. After meeting with the NJPIRG organizers and a Referendum Coordinator, the Oversight Committee issued the following statement, "It has come to the attention of the Oversight Committee that from Wednesday-Friday (10/23-10/25) current members of MASSPIRG and CONPIRG volunteered as poll workers for the 2020 Referendum. According to page 6 of Rutgers Policy 10.3.3. 'Members of the governing boards of the petitioning student organization, its staff, or students enrolled in internship programs conducted

by the petitioning student organization may not be hired as referenda poll workers.’ Due to the fact that the US PIRG is a “federation of state PIRGs”, the Oversight Committee has voted that no current PIRG employee or affiliate may act in the role of poll worker for the remainder of the referendum. This is also based off of the knowledge that in the past, NJPIRG has spent some of its money in grants to other states chapters of PIRG”.

#### *Collaboration between Petitioning Organization and Referendum Coordinators*

My biggest concern throughout the referendum was apparent coordination between NJPIRG and the Referendum Coordinator. Through the Referendum Coordinator is paid by the petitioning organization, they ought to act upon their own behalf. With the poll worker situation, I asked the Referendum Coordinator why he would ever allow Massachusetts or Connecticut PIRG members to volunteer and he replied that they were short on volunteers and a NJPIRG member had forwarded their names along. Identities of poll workers were available to the Oversight Committee and we were informed that none of them were affiliated with NJPIRG. However, this sort of violation was due to the interaction between NJPIRG organizers and the Referendum Coordinators.

#### *Mobile Polling*

Based off of the knowledge that a similar system was approved by the Daily Targum Oversight Committee, the NJPIRG Oversight Committee approved mobile polling locations with the following locations.

“The Oversight Committee can approve certain poll workers or referendum coordinators to be “mobile polling locations”. The following rules apply to this stipulation:

1. The OC must be informed of these individuals and their identities must be approved BEFORE they can be mobile polling location workers
2. The OC must be informed of the times that workers will be working as mobile polling location workers
3. In compliance with Article VII. Section B) “Campaigning shall be allowed in favor or opposition of the referendum and its passage by lobbying voters at distances of at least fifty (50) feet from any polling unit voting location. No materials that encourage an affirmative or negative vote shall be visible within the aforementioned distance.” Poll workers must keep this in mind when soliciting votes.
4. Soliciting within Residential dorms or non- Rutgers affiliated buildings are not permitted.
5. Mobile poll workers must display the appeals to voters at all times. If an announcement is being made to vote, the appeal must be said orally.
6. If announcements are being made in classrooms, verbal permission from the Professor must be obtained.
7. Votes must be tallied by the mobile poll worker in the same way that votes must be tallied from standard polling locations”.

In hindsight, I do not think a similar measure should be approved without significant changes to 10.3.3. This is because it is hard to monitor mobile polling workers. However, it definitely improved voter turnout. There is a probability that many students never walked past a polling booth and thus were disenfranchised from voting.

### *Tabulation Method*

The original method approved by the Oversight Committee proved to be extremely inefficient. Recording the individual RUID's into the computer put us on track not to finish tabulation within the allotted time. Thus, the method used in Camden and Newark was adopted. The revised method submitted to the Oversight Committee was as follows:

1. "Envelopes are opened and ballots are checked for responses. Ballots are then placed back in their respective envelopes.
2. Envelopes are marked with a check and sorted into piles based on ballot response (yes, no). Ballots that are determined to be invalid are voided and placed into a third pile.
3. Once a pile accumulates 150 envelopes, or when the total store of valid votes for a division is depleted, the pile receives a Post It note denoting its total count and ballot response.
4. Completed piles are given to another poll worker, coordinator or committee member to cross check the total count.
5. Once this process is completed for a division, the total count and totals based on responses are recorded into the "OC TOTALS" spreadsheet and checked against the requirements necessary for the ballot question to pass".

This method was far faster and we were able to finish tabulation within 2 days. The fact that votes had been validated beforehand saved us time during tabulation.

One other problem that arose during tabulation was that many Oversight Committee members were unable to volunteer to help tabulate. One member of the Oversight Committee must be present during tabulation, thus limiting the time that poll workers could tabulate. Personally, I volunteered to tabulate 21 hours that week, one other representative volunteered 7 hours, and another 2 hours. Four of the representatives volunteered 0 hours, putting a strain on the other members to do more hours. It ought to be a requirement to be on the committee to help tabulate for at least a few hours.

### *Appeals*

An anonymous appeal was filed. The appeal was a compilation of testimonials found on Reddit. The Oversight Committee met within 24 hours of the appeal being filed in order to discuss the accusations. Allegations of sexual harassment were forwarded to the Rutgers Title IX Coordinator. In addition, NJPIRG has informed me that they are also doing an investigation into the claims. There were many different accusations in the appeal, ranging from annoyance at poll workers conducting in class ballot collections to accusations of NJPIRG members throwing chairs. After discussing with my committee, we decided that compiling claims on Reddit does not suffice as evidence when key facts such as date, time, and location of infraction are missing. In addition, appeals ought to be filed by the individuals who witnessed the event. This is based

off of the logic that if an appeal is found to have merit, the person who filed the appeal ought to be willing to provide further evidence and testimony, unless their appeal is detailed enough to stand on its own.

### *The Role of Social Media*

The Referendum is very lengthy at 35 days. By the end of the referendum, popular social media sites such as Reddit and Facebook seemed to have displayed student annoyance at the persistence of the poll workers. This was the impetus of the appeal, in which testimonials were compiled into a singular appeal. Social media takes the feelings of a few passionate people and make it seem to reflect the will of everyone, as they are the only voice represented. Though social media lambasted the referendum, the majority of students voted in favor of the NJPIRG waivable fee.

### *Thanks*

Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow committee members and advisors. When I called a meeting to discuss the appeal, over half of the members were able to come, even in less than 24 hours notice. I learned so much about all the other governing councils here at Rutgers and I think more intergovernmental councils would be helpful in the future. In addition, I would like to thank my advisors Teri and Lori for being so helpful throughout this entire process. From phone calls at odd hours to helping connect me with legal advice, I could not have done it without them.