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Poll inspector: Port Chester treated Hispanic and white voters differently.

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A Latina poll inspector testified yesterday that election workers in Port Chester treated Hispanic and white voters differently.

Luz Mariana Chavista said she worked at the polls in Port Chester during six elections since 2002. She said election workers often asked Latinos for backup identification, in addition to their voter registration cards, such as a driver's license. White voters were seldom asked for such identification, she said.

Chavista also testified that election workers cordially greeted white voters at the polls but virtually ignored Latinos. She said white voters who were not found on the voter-registration rolls were offered an affidavit ballot, but Hispanics were turned away.

Chavista testified yesterday in a federal voting rights trial that revolves around whether the village's election system illegally dilutes the Hispanic vote. The federal government sued the village in December, challenging the method it uses to elect its six trustees. It wants the village to replace its voting system - in which trustees are elected in a villagewide vote - with one in which they are elected from different districts.

During cross-examination, Joseph Sack, a lawyer for the village, grilled Chavista on her seven past addresses in Port Chester and asked her to recall the specific elections she had worked. Chavista said she could not remember.

Trustee Domenick Cicatelli and village planning consultant Patrick Cleary also took the stand on the fifth day of the trial.

Cleary, who has worked as a planner for the village in some capacity since 1986, testified to the accuracy of the 2000 census and disputed the population counts of some village blocks.

He also spoke about recent changes in the Hispanic-majority district proposed by the Justice Department as a result of growth and development, and described the population in the district as transient, but could not point to any studies or analysis to back up his statements.

Cicatelli, a Republican, said he was angry when he received a controversial flier mailed by his former running mate Bart Didden. The flier viciously attacked his opponent Dennis Pilla and his campaign manager, Blanca Lopez, and has been denounced by some, including Cicatelli, as racist.

"I was furious because if you look at this, you would assume that it had come from Mr. Pilla's opponent and it didn't," Cicatelli said, adding that the flier sent the opposite message he was trying to convey.

U.S. District Judge Stephen Robinson asked Cicatelli whether he should be troubled that a former trustee candidate had sent out such a flier.

"It certainly shouldn't be something you ignore," Cicatelli said, "and you should be troubled."

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