



# Election Oversight Program

## Election Report to Philadelphia Voters For the April 22, 2008 Primary Election

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### **Introduction**

On April 22, 2008, Pennsylvania held one of the most important primary elections in decades. The Committee of Seventy and its partner organizations responded to this challenge by recruiting and training 800 volunteers – the largest voter protection program in Seventy’s and Philadelphia’s history. Intense interest in the Clinton-Obama race put Philadelphia in the national spotlight, so it was important to show that the City can conduct clean and fair elections.

Philadelphia’s 1,030,991 eligible voters included nearly 50,000 newly registered Democrats – some first-time voters and others who switched from other parties to vote in the Democratic presidential primary.

Three high-profile and hotly-contested local races added to the intensity of the primary: the Anne Dicker-John Dougherty-Larry Farnese battle to replace outgoing state Senator Vincent Fumo in the First Senatorial District, the Guy Lewis-Tony Payton showdown in the 179<sup>th</sup> House District, and the Bill Keller-Christian DiCicco contest in the 184<sup>th</sup> House District. While these races didn’t generate as much attention as the presidential race, they were very significant to Philadelphians.

Overall, April 22<sup>nd</sup> turned out to be a very good day for Philadelphia. The majority of problems were resolved quickly. With a few minor exceptions, those requiring more serious attention by either law enforcement authorities or by the courts were also handled promptly.

City Commissioner Chairwoman Marge Tartaglione said Seventy had too many volunteers at the polls and maintained that this led to difficulties. Seventy takes her allegations seriously and will investigate when she responds to our request for specifics.

No operation involving 800 volunteers is ever flawless. However, Seventy believes that its Election Oversight program was orderly and well-run and that our strong volunteer presence deterred conduct that otherwise could have escalated into more serious issues. Our volunteers overwhelmingly reported that they found their experience meaningful and enjoyable. Volunteering on Election Day is a great way to get to know your city and to do an important public service at the same time.

This report summarizes what occurred during the April 22<sup>nd</sup> primary election through the eyes of the thousands of voters Seventy's volunteers had the privilege to help.

### **The April 2008 Election Oversight Program**

Seventy's goal for the April 22<sup>nd</sup> primary – which was shared by its major partner, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law – was to have a significant number of trained volunteers at polls serving the City's 1,681 voting divisions to:

1. Ensure that every eligible voter was able to cast his or her ballot.
2. Minimize the opportunities for voting irregularities and intimidation.
3. Document and make every effort to resolve voters' complaints and problems at the polls.

The Election Oversight Program is a highly structured operation designed to ensure maximum coverage of Philadelphia's polling places by trained non-partisan volunteers from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. Each of our volunteers has one of the following roles:

- **Citizen Teams** of two or three individuals are assigned to polling places within one, or perhaps two, of the City's 66 wards. These teams assist voters, resolve minor disputes and generally make sure that everything at the polling place is operating smoothly. Citizen Teams write field reports on all of their visits so that Seventy has a clear picture of what went on throughout the day.
- **Legal Teams** back up Citizen Teams in several wards, in addition to working an assignment of one or two City wards. Legal Teams respond to more complicated issues that may not be resolvable on-site. A small group of volunteer attorneys also serve as Seventy's eyes and ears in Central Election Court by monitoring all litigation activity there throughout the day.
- **Regional Team Leaders** are experienced Election Day volunteers who review complaints for assignment to Field Teams, Legal Teams or, where appropriate, to law enforcement authorities (including the Philadelphia Law Department, the Philadelphia Police Department, the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, the Office of the Inspector General, and the United States Department of Justice).
- **Dispatch Center** volunteers answer calls to our hotline from voters, Seventy field volunteers and poll workers. They then document complaints and refer them to the Regional Team Leaders for resolution.

Each election is different and each year's Election Oversight Program varies accordingly. For April 22<sup>nd</sup>, Seventy made a deliberate decision to recruit and train at least 600 volunteers, a slight increase over our previous record of 550 volunteers for the May 2007 mayoral primary. Our total of 800 volunteers far exceeded our expectations.

Seventy's partnership with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law – the nationally renowned voters' rights advocacy organization – allowed us to pool our respective resources and strengths for this crucial primary.

In addition to the Lawyers' Committee, the volunteer recruitment efforts and logistical support of the following local partners were critical to the success of the Election Oversight program:

Avencia, Inc.	Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP
Congreso de Latinos Unidos	Philadelphia <i>Daily News</i>
Dechert LLP	Special People in Northeast, Inc.
DLA Piper	Temple University
Drexel University	University of Pennsylvania Law School
KPMG	White and Williams LLP

Working together, we were able to recruit and train 800 volunteers, including:

- 25 Temple University Political Science students inspecting voting machines before they were shipped to the polls.
- Nearly 600 citizen and legal volunteers at the polls.
- 160 volunteers manning four call-in centers: Seventy's office in 8 Penn Center, the DLA Piper law firm in One Liberty Place, The League of Women Voters' at Channel 6 ABC and, for Spanish-speaking voters, at Congreso de Latinos Unidos.
- 15 Team Leaders supervising the field volunteers.
- 3 attorneys providing legal representation in Central Election Court.

New features of the April 2008 program included:

- **Targeted Oversight Program:** Thanks to a grant from The William Penn Foundation, Seventy launched its first-ever targeted Election Oversight program to focus both attention and volunteers on three key local races: the 1<sup>st</sup> state Senatorial District and the 179<sup>th</sup> and 184<sup>th</sup> state House Districts. The major components of this program included:
  - Hiring a Special Election Coordinator, who is fluent in Spanish and has community organizing experience, to oversee all activities in the targeted districts.
  - 182 volunteers specially trained by Seventy to address voting issues unique to the districts' multi-cultural populations.
  - Creation of "Philly Ballot Blog," a dedicated feature on Seventy's website that provided daily updates of media coverage of the hot local races, with links to articles in Philadelphia's daily and weekly newspapers, as well as to relevant video and audio pieces. Also posted were Seventy's exclusive interviews with each of the three Democratic candidates in the First Senatorial District.
  - Six exclusive election analyses on Seventy's website by award-winning former *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist Tom Ferrick, Jr.
  - Extensive marketing of Seventy's increased presence and services on local radio and television programs most accessible to, and used by, Hispanic voters

who are highly concentrated in the targeted districts. The Special Election Coordinator made three appearances on Spanish radio shows and two on Spanish news stations.

- Distribution of 5,000 “palm cards” outlining Seventy’s services.
- Advertising of Seventy’s focused program in Philadelphia-area Hispanic and African-American news outlets, including *Al Día*, *Impacto*, *The Philadelphia Tribune* and *Sunday Sun*.
- **Volunteer Training Video:** To increase consistency and to best prepare volunteers for their Election Day assignment, Seventy developed a fifteen minute video that was narrated by former local news anchor Marc Howard. The video supplemented the training sessions and volunteer manual and was made available online.
- **Updated Polling Place Locator:** With over 100 polling place changes before the election, finding out where to vote was half the battle for many voters. Seventy’s Citizen Access Center – a dual resource that allows voters to locate their polling place using either the telephone or the Internet – was frequently updated to reflect last minute changes.
- **On-Site Legal Representatives:** Representatives from both the Philadelphia District Attorney’s office and the City’s Law Department were stationed at Seventy’s headquarters. As counsel to the City Commissioners, the Law Department served as the interface between Seventy’s program and the City.
- **1-866-OUR-VOTE:** Calls made to the Lawyers’ Committee’s well-tested 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline fed a sophisticated system for electronically documenting and tracking complaints – an obvious necessity for the quickest possible handling of problems.
- **Real-Time Complaint Mapping:** Through a partnership with Avencia, Inc. Seventy piloted a web-based application that mapped complaints called into the 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline in “real time.” By clicking on a map that was colored-coded by type of complaint, users could obtain more details about a specific problem. Users could also overlay legislative districts, political boundaries and Seventy’s oversight regions onto the map to determine if any problems were systemic or part of trends unique to the specific political districts. The map was hosted on Avencia’s website and projected both at Seventy’s office and DLA Piper, the Election Day Hotline Call Center, throughout the day.

## **Problems on Election Day**

Seventy volunteers made more than 2,500 visits to over 1,400 (nearly 84%) of Philadelphia’s 1,681 voting divisions. This was the most far reaching deployment in Seventy’s history.

Many of the problems Seventy volunteers encountered could be resolved on-site, such as asking for the removal of campaign materials posted too close to the room where voting takes place, explaining to voters with registration problems that they may be entitled to vote by provisional ballot, or reminding polling place officials to hang up the required notices.

As always, some problems could not be resolved at the polling places by Seventy volunteers. These complaints were directed to other sources for help, such as the District Attorney’s Office. On the rare occasion that a problem could not be settled on Election Day, Seventy made sure that the problem was fully documented so that it does not come up again in future elections.

The following charts summarize (1) calls received by the 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline, and (2) problems documented in the field reports taken by volunteers.

<b>Problems Reported By Calls To 1-866-OUR-VOTE</b>	
<b>Registration Problems</b> (Voter registration records inaccurate in poll book, previously registered voters missing from poll book, newly registered voters who are not listed in poll books or in the state registration database.)	24%
<b>Personnel Problems</b> (Denial of provisional ballots, requiring returning and previously registered voters to present identification, and other misconduct by polling place officials.)	22%
<b>Equipment Problems</b> (Voting machines not working properly.)	18%
<b>Polling Place Problems</b> (Including late openings, inadequate polling place facilities and the absence of polling place materials.)	17%
<b>Voter Intimidation</b> (Perceived threatening or intimidating activity aimed at voters.)	7%
<b>Electioneering</b> (Illegal campaigning within 10 feet of the voting room.)	7%
<b>Disability Access Problems</b> (Polling place does not meet federal and state handicapped accessibility standards.)	3%
<b>Absentee Ballot Problems</b> (Voters who did not receive absentee ballots.)	2%
<b>Language Problems</b> (Lack of translators or difficulties for voters with limited English capabilities.)	1%

<b>Inquiries Called In To 1-866-OUR-VOTE</b>	
<b>Polling Place Inquiries</b> (Voters calling to find out where to vote.)	78%
<b>Registration Inquiries</b> (Voters calling to find out if they are registered to vote or if they are allowed to vote in the primary.)	17%
<b>Absentee Ballot Inquiries</b> (Questions about absentee voting procedures.)	5%

<b>Problems Documented In Field Reports</b> (Problem definitions are located in the chart above.)	
<b>Disability Access Problems</b>	22%
<b>Registration Problems</b>	20%
<b>Polling Place Problems</b>	17%
<b>Equipment Problems</b>	14%
<b>Electioneering</b>	13%
<b>Personnel Problems</b>	9%
<b>Voter Intimidation</b>	3%
<b>Other Problems</b>	1%
<b>Language Problems</b>	< 1%
<b>Absentee Ballot Problems</b>	< 1%

The most common Election Code violations reported in the field reports relate to access to polling places by disabled voters, specifically voters using wheelchairs. Philadelphia has struggled to comply with federal requirements that all polling places must be made accessible for handicapped voters. According to the City's Board of Elections, this is exceedingly difficult because Philadelphia's disabled population is widely dispersed and many polling places cannot be adapted to accommodate disabled voters. For example, the difficulty in finding suitable public facilities for use on Election Day has resulted in the need to use private homes as polling places. The City Commissioners maintain that they are working to address the handicapped accessibility issue, as well as to determine how best to ensure that the City's disabled citizens can vote.

Problems surrounding voter registration comprised nearly 20% of the complaints documented in the field reports. This is not surprising given the large voter turnout (53.77% of 799,349 Democratic voters; 14.73% of 145,434 Republican voters) and the large number of new registrations (38,533 new voters). The most common problems included:

- Newly registered Democrats whose party affiliation in the poll books was listed as "Republican" or "Independent."
- Misprints in the polls books, including (in several divisions) notations that the voter "needs assistance" to vote next to every name.
- Long-time voters being dropped from the poll book at their polling place without notification, including voters who participated in the November 2007 Municipal Election.
- Voters and poll workers not able to reach the Philadelphia Voter Registration Office on Election Day by phone to check their registration status due to high call volume.

Examples of other problems included:

- Polling places around the city reported machine problems in the morning. The majority of these problems were due to poll workers not setting the machines up properly for a Primary Election. These problems resulted in late openings at some of these polling places.
- Stamps and ink pads with the name of a write-in candidate were improperly located on the voter sign-in table inside polling places in West Philadelphia. Since stamps and ink pads are not part of the official election materials permitted inside the polls, they can only be brought in – and leave with – a voter.
- Multiple polling places that had problems with provisional ballots improperly withheld from voters. Many of these incidents resulted from newly registered voters not listed in the poll book.
- Polling places that turned out to have much more than maximum number of registered voters (1,200) permitted by the Election Code for each voting division faced long lines and frustrated voters. Some of these divisions have double and even triple the maximum number.
- Multiple polling places had poll books that listed everyone in the division as assistance permitted. In each of these cases, the poll officials remarked that this was the first time the books had ever been marked as such.

## **Looking Ahead**

In the months before the November 4, 2008 General Election, Seventy will be working aggressively to:

- Continue to professionalize its Election Oversight program.
- Ensure that every polling place in the City of Philadelphia is covered throughout Election Day by well-trained volunteers.
- Establish new partnerships with local civic and community organizations to proactively address the concerns of their constituencies.
- Develop an effective voter education program that helps people understand their rights.

We look forward to working with our partners and our volunteers to guarantee that the voters have the best possible experience in future elections.

**Appendix A.**

Problems documented in Field Reports by ward. For a map of Philadelphia’s wards, please see Appendix B.

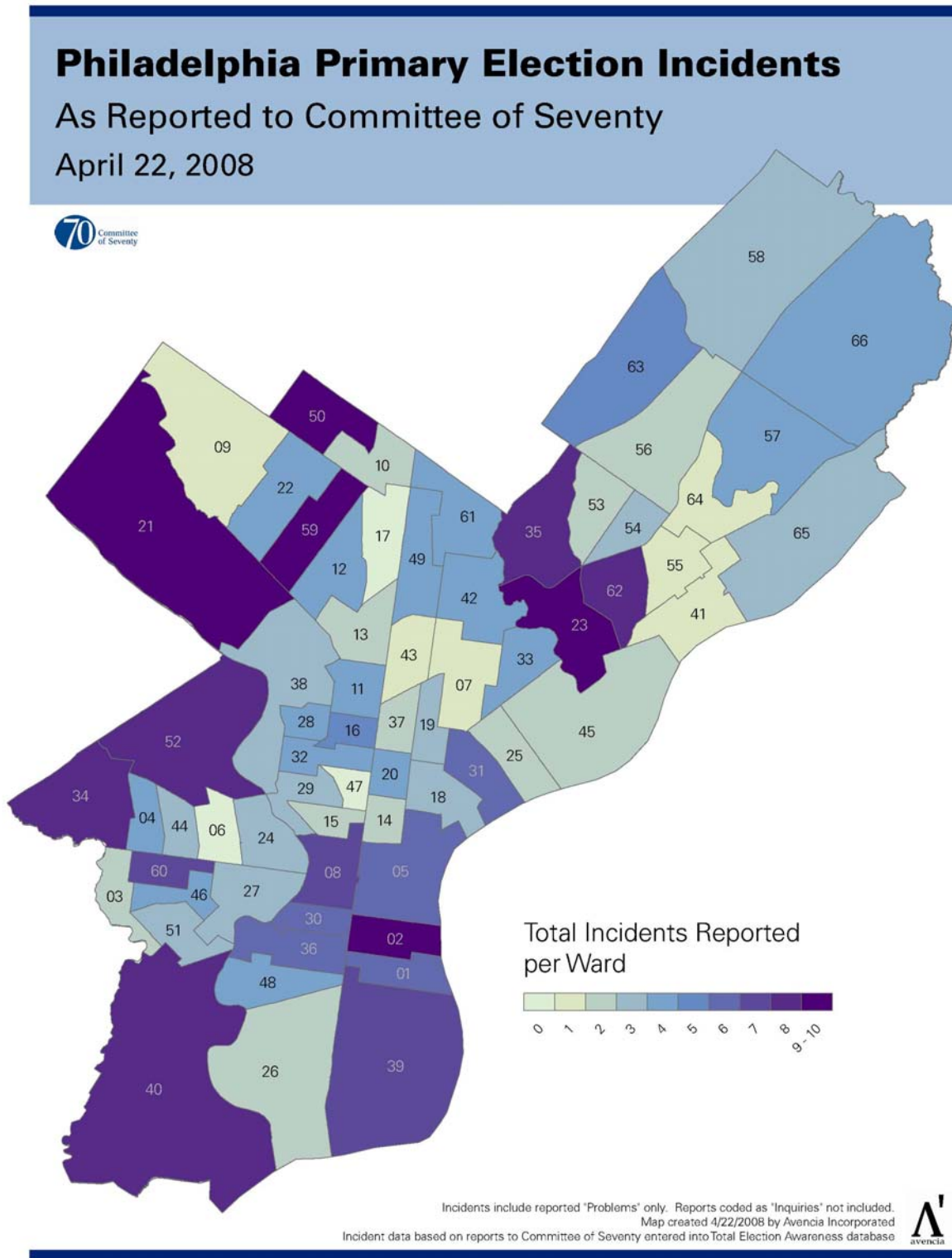
Ward	Visits	Problems Reported	
		Ward Total	Percent of City Total
1	57	37	2.67%
2	59	29	2.09%
3	59	29	2.09%
4	14	7	0.51%
5	59	36	2.60%
6	18	5	0.36%
7	52	36	2.60%
8	67	35	2.53%
9	31	16	1.15%
10	87	45	3.25%
11	22	8	0.58%
12	41	34	2.45%
13	26	22	1.59%
14	10	2	0.14%
15	46	28	2.02%
16	43	22	1.59%
17	45	20	1.44%
18	31	13	0.94%
19	52	14	1.01%
20	1	1	0.07%
21	65	26	1.88%
22	23	15	1.08%
23	36	22	1.59%
24	29	17	1.23%
25	34	26	1.88%
26	66	22	1.59%
27	36	13	0.94%
28	33	24	1.73%
29	49	14	1.01%
30	41	17	1.23%
31	33	10	0.72%
32	70	37	2.67%
33	15	11	0.79%

Ward	Visits	Problems Reported	
		Ward Total	Percent of City Total
34	12	7	0.51%
35	39	16	1.15%
36	43	15	1.08%
37	16	10	0.72%
38	31	12	0.87%
39	86	52	3.75%
40	36	16	1.15%
41	51	15	1.08%
42	32	29	2.09%
43	11	7	0.51%
44	38	23	1.66%
45	38	27	1.95%
46	24	16	1.15%
47	35	8	0.58%
48	61	40	2.89%
49	43	27	1.95%
50	43	20	1.44%
51	54	44	3.17%
52	60	43	3.10%
53	23	20	1.44%
54	24	8	0.58%
55	11	7	0.51%
56	19	11	0.79%
57	54	17	1.23%
58	35	25	1.80%
59	46	26	1.88%
60	49	43	3.10%
61	28	12	0.87%
62	23	30	2.16%
63	34	17	1.23%
64	32	24	1.73%
65	1	0	0.00%
66	23	26	1.88%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2505</b>	<b>1386</b>	



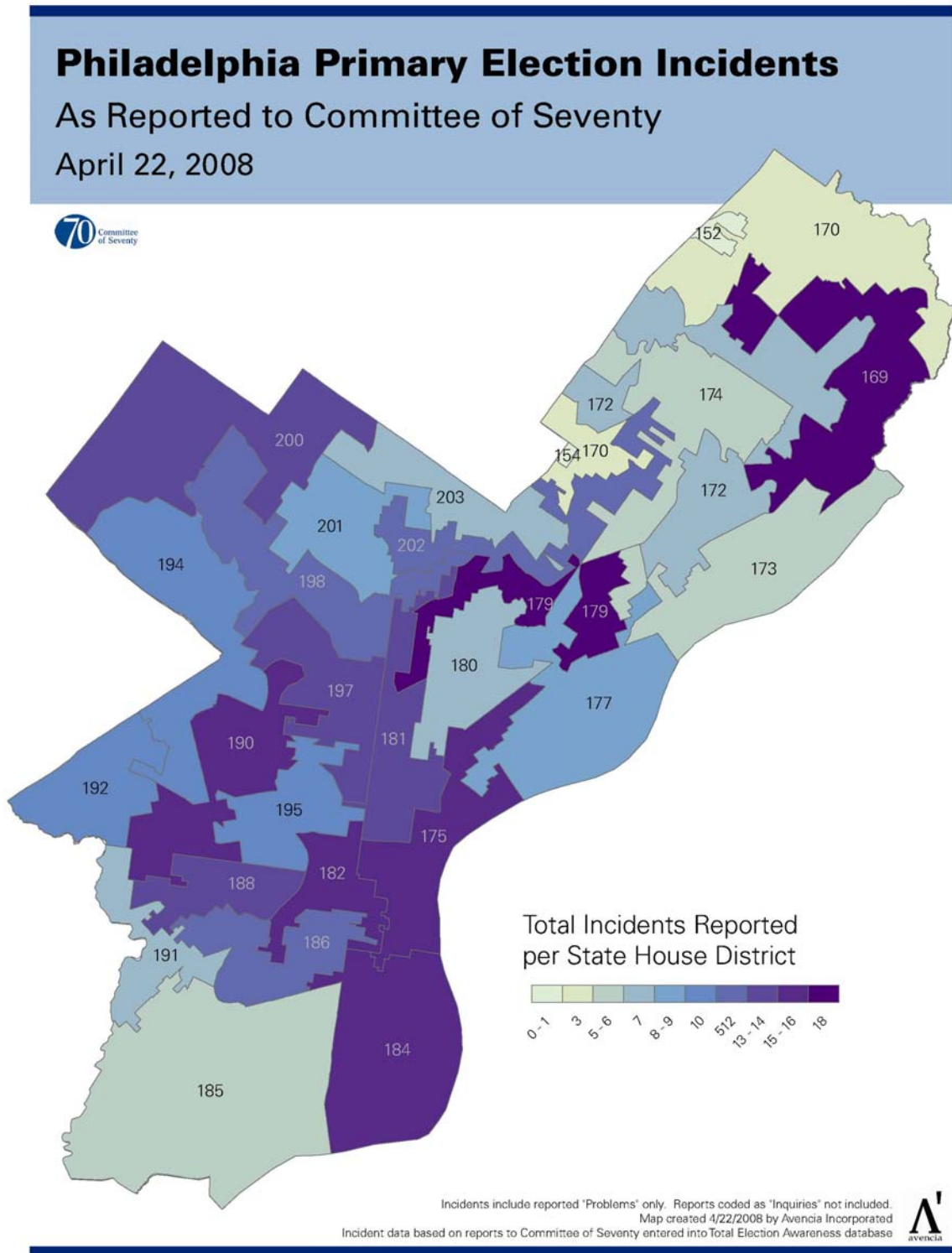
**Appendix B.**

Map of problems in Philadelphia called into 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline by ward.



**Appendix C.**

Map of problems in Philadelphia called into 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline by Pennsylvania State Representative Districts.



**Appendix D.**

Map of problems in Philadelphia called into 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline by Pennsylvania State Senate Districts.

