



Summary Report: Mount Allison University Investigation

Elections New Brunswick engaged the services of a private investigator, Jacques Ouellette, to conduct an independent investigation into challenges faced by student voters during the September 14, 2020 provincial election in the riding of Memramcook-Tantramar.

The investigation was requested to examine the circumstances that resulted in students from Mount Allison University being challenged on their eligibility to vote, and possibly denied their right to vote at a polling station in the community of Sackville.

Mr. Ouellette conducted twenty-two interviews, which included students, leaders of the Mount Allison University Student's Union, the Returning Officer for the electoral district of Memramcook-Tantramar, as well as election officials who worked on Election Day at the Tantramar Civic Center polling station where students encountered problems.

From the information gathered during the investigation, a major factor contributing to the problems encountered by students revolved around confusion, as well as misinterpretation, of the 40-day residency rules as they apply to student voters. From the comments of students and poll workers that were interviewed, it was evident election workers and political scrutineers present at that polling station were providing contradictory information to students arriving to vote.

Another source of confusion for some students was a proof of residency letter provided to students living on campus by Mount Allison University. One of the scrutineers present at the poll, who should not have directly engaged with electors, incorrectly told some students the letter was not acceptable as proof, and they could be committing voter fraud if they voted.

In his findings, the investigator concluded that the issues encountered by students would likely have been reduced through better training of the poll workers. In particular, more emphasis needed to be placed on the rules as they related to residency requirements and acceptable proof of address for students living in residence.

Based on the investigator's findings, Chief Electoral Officer, Kim Poffenroth, has identified the following actions to be taken:

1. a review of all materials used during the training of poll workers related to the 40-day residency requirement rules;
2. the residency rules be emphasized during training, particularly in electoral districts where post-secondary education institutions are located;
3. candidates and political parties be educated on the residency rules and be reminded of the proper role and behaviour of scrutineers at polling stations;
4. the residency rules and registration requirements be better communicated to students, through the New Brunswick Student Alliance and other representative groups; and
5. an emphasis be placed on the importance of training poll workers on appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask electors and which poll workers may ask specific questions.

Poffenroth noted the next fixed provincial general election is scheduled for October 21, 2024, which comes well after the traditional startup of the fall semester of classes at post-secondary institutions and should further reduce any confusion over the 40-day residency rules.