

The Village of Pelham Manor is one of only a few villages in Westchester County that administer their own elections. In Pelham Manor, our village clerk is also our election commissioner and village manager, a full-time highly paid position that reports directly to the Board of Trustees. As such, he has a clear vested interest in the outcome of the elections that he oversees. Additionally, while the Board of Trustees oversees him in every other function, when it comes to election-related matters they are perpetually wary of appearing to get involved in their own elections. As such, our election commissioner effectively operates without oversight.

As members of our community experienced in our 2021 village elections, we have no process in place to allow for a voter to cure a rejected ballot. We also have no process for provisional ballots. Since our elections are in March rather than November, we have no access to early voting. The absentee ballot application was not available on the village website until the 2021 election at which point it contained so many errors that it needed to be corrected three times during the final weeks leading up to the election, including errors with the deadline and mailing address. The village Board of Trustees has yet to take action to address these issues or accept help from the county BOE in administering our elections going forward.

In fact, in 2018 we joined over 700 of our neighbors, to petition the Village of Pelham Manor under New York State Village Law Section 9-912 to allow the citizens of Pelham Manor to decide by referendum the question of moving our village elections to November, would place it under the auspices of the county election system. In a village with a population of 5,500, these signatures represented a significant portion of the constituency. Despite this, the petitions were rejected by our village clerk on trivial technical grounds. We brought an Article 78 proceeding but our appeal was rejected as the judge opted to defer to our clerk's assessment. As stated above, our clerk is also our election commissioner and village manager. This conflict of interest was disregarded by the judge. And despite the electors' clear request for a referendum, our Board of Trustees has continued to refuse to put the election date question to a vote.

We are in desperate need of external, professional, bi-partisan administration and oversight of our local elections. Without action at the State level, we fear these issues will persist in the Village of Pelham Manor. Please help us bring election reform to our village.

Sincerely,

Alexy Scholl and Michael Teitelbaum
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