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Re: Voting Rights in New York State

To the Committee:

Thank you for holding hearings and collecting testimony from voters in our state so that voting can be improved and made better available to all.

I am writing to urge that you consider implementing universal vote by mail for our state. I applied for an absentee ballot for the Presidential election last November 2020, as did the two other registered voters in my household. We all sent our requests in on the same day, in separate envelopes. Both my husband and daughter received their ballots, but I did not. In order to vote, I had to go in person during the pandemic to vote. If I had been sick or out of town, I would have been disenfranchised even though I had planned ahead to vote.

What really struck me about this experience was not just that my ballot mysteriously never arrived, it was that voting was something one had to know a lot about. There was information flowing about how to vote, but it was varied and lengthy, and required several steps. Voters would be required to (1) receive the information (2) understand the information (3) be willing to go through multiple steps to vote (4) be willing and able to plan ahead about how to cast their vote. All of these things are really just barriers for people who might be sick, burdened by work, care responsibilities, or other challenges.

This experience has been disappointing for me in the sense that it's just not how a healthy democracy should work. Our country should be at the forefront of democracy leadership, and we can do that here in our own state. Just as other states have done, some for quite some time now, and simply mail a ballot to every voter, to either be returned by mail or in person. This practice has shown to increase voter participation, is nonpartisan, and is simply the most seamless and fair way to do things. Please adopt this modern practice as it has proven to be effective and inclusive.

Thank you,

Deborah Lowery Knapp