



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

## Senate Elections Committee to Hold Final Hearing this Month Introducing Proposals to Update and Reform the State's Poll Site Accessibility and Absentee Ballot Laws, and Poll Site Operations

MALCOLM A. SMITH May 13, 2009

| ISSUE: **ELECTIONS**

| COMMITTEE: **ELECTIONS**

**WHEN:** Thursday May 14th, 10 AM – 1 PM

**WHERE:** Syracuse Common Council Chambers, 233 East Washington Street, City Hall 4th Floor, Syracuse, New York

Tomorrow, the Elections Committee will hold its final hearing this month dedicated to soliciting public comment on a number of proposals to update and reform the state's poll site accessibility and absentee ballot laws, and poll site operations. The May hearings in Albany (May 11) and Syracuse (May 14) are the second set in a series of five that will continue in June, September and November. Future topics include: campaign finance reform; Board of Elections oversight; additional election reform laws; and oversight of the November elections.

Tomorrow's hearing will emphasize the necessity of a sound, effective and accessible voting process –for those who cannot go to the polls, and for those who do go – through the

moment a ballot is cast. Under the previous majority, the voting process was complex and confusing, making it unnecessarily difficult for New Yorkers to participate in the most fundamental democratic process. With these proposals, more votes will be cast and counted than ever before.

The bill package for the May public hearings includes legislation to:

### **ENACT EARLY VOTING IN NEW YORK**

- Allow voters to cast a ballot at the county Board of Elections from 14 days before the election until one day before the election.

### **SIMPLIFY AND IMPROVE ABSENTEE BALLOT VOTING**

- Amend the constitution to allow no-excuse absentee voting by removing the restrictions on a voter's right to vote by absentee ballot.
- Eliminate the requirement that voters who request an absentee ballot disclose private and personal information about why they cannot vote at their polling station.

### **MORE EFFICIENT AND ACCESSIBLE POLL SITES**

- Require affidavit ballots to be counted if a voter appears at a polling place in the correct county but in the incorrect district.
- Require that all polling places be accessible to the disabled.
- Authorize the Board of Elections to employ election inspectors to work half-day shifts with adjusted compensation.

- Require poll workers to inform voters who are not in poll books of their correct polling place and election district within the county, and provides poll workers with sufficient maps and addresses to do so.
- Require that paper ballots have a box, oval or other area that the voter can mark to alert the voting system that all “undervotes” are intentional.

Questions about these hearings may be directed to Bernadette Oliver at (518) 455-2310. ([oliver@senate.state.ny.us](mailto:oliver@senate.state.ny.us))