



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Senate Elections Committee Holds Hearing Introducing Proposals to Update and Reform the State's Poll Site Accessibility and Absentee Ballot Laws

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR May 10, 2009

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Monday, the Elections Committee held the first of two hearings 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.

Those who testified about the need for a sound and effective voting process included: Susan Lerner, Common Cause New York Executive Director; Aimee Allaud, League of Women Voters of NYS Elections Specialist; Russ Haven, NY Public Interest Research Group Legal Council, and others.

"Today's hearing addressed Election Day and poll site reforms, two critical aspects of the electoral process," said Senator Joseph P. Addabbo Jr., Elections Committee Chair. "We are

committed to ensuring that every New Yorkers who wishes to do so can vote on election day, and the proposals presented today will ensure that more ballots will be cast and counted than ever before.”

These hearings will emphasize the necessity of a fair, open 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.

Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith said, “Through these hearings and the work of the Elections Committee, the Senate is taking significant steps to improve the election process by proactively including voters at all stages. By soliciting feedback now, we are ensuring that as the Committee proceeds, reform is made with the best interest of New Yorkers in mind. By working to make more votes count across the state, and ensure that every individual is given a voice in the democratic process, we continue to demonstrate that above all else, this legislature is working for the people.”

This dialogue between lawmakers and the public is part of the Senate’s continued commitment to beginning a robust committee process, developing sound public policy through open dialogue, and creating transparency in the legislative process.

Senator Addabbo concluded, “I am hopeful that through these hearings we will assure the people that they will be able to participate in the most fundamental process in our democracy and instill confidence in the voters that their votes and voices matter.”

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

LEGISLATE 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.

** Thursday's hearing is scheduled to take place in Syracuse, New York from 10 AM to 1 PM at Syracuse Common Council Chambers, 233 East Washington Street, City Hall 4th Floor. **