



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

Kavanagh, Good Government Groups, and Other Legislators Call on Governor Cuomo to Fund Early Voting in the Fiscal 2018-2019 Executive Budget

JACK STERNE | 646-535-0160 January 9, 2018

| ISSUE: **EARLY VOTING, VOTING, VOTING REFORM, VOTING RIGHTS**



(Albany, NY) -- One day after being appointed Ranking Democratic Member of the New York State Senate Elections Committee, Senator Brian Kavanagh today joined with fellow legislators and advocates — including the Brennan Center for Justice, Citizen Action of New York, Citizens Union, Common Cause/NY, the League of Women Voters of New York State, the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Planned Parenthood, and

Transportation Workers United Local 100 and colleagues in the Senate to urge Governor Andrew Cuomo to fully fund early voting in the Fiscal 2018-2019 Executive Budget.

New York has repeatedly ranked as one of the worst states for voter turnout, and barely more than half of voters regularly take part in each statewide election. This failure is largely driven by outdated laws that make it harder for New Yorkers to vote.

One such law requires New Yorkers to vote only on Election Day, creating an artificial barrier to voting for those with personal, family, or work obligations on Election Day. Allowing voting during the week preceding an election -- including on the weekend -- would enable more New Yorkers to vote, and bring New York closer to the goal of full voter participation.

“It’s difficult to say ‘every vote counts in New York’ when we have laws on the books that make it harder -- if not impossible -- for some eligible New Yorkers to cast their ballots. We all know that voting is a fundamental right, but our rhetoric is far ahead of our reality,” **Senator Brian Kavanagh, Ranking Member of the Elections Committee, said.** “No one should be disenfranchised simply because they’re unable to vote on a single day. Early voting is a commonsense reform whose time has come, and funding this reform in the budget isn’t just the right thing to do -- it’s the smart thing to do.”

Advocacy organizations have estimated early voting and electronic poll books (which would facilitate implementation of early voting) would cost New York State roughly \$7 million -- compared to the State’s \$160 billion budget. Providing these funds in the budget would address concerns in some counties that the cost would be difficult to bear locally.

“Unless we expand voting rights, the people who are most disadvantaged by the system will not have the ability to participate in changing it. We know from states that have already implemented early voting that communities like mine, with a larger percentage of low

income individuals, are among those most impacted by early voting. I agree with Senator Kavanagh that we must include funding for early voting in the state budget, and I look forward to fighting with him and my colleagues for fair and freer elections in New York State," Senator Brian Benjamin said.

"Budgets are statements of values and if New York is to be the progressive capital of the nation, we must enshrine access to the ballot as one of our values," said Senator Leroy Comrie. "I join Senator Kavanagh in urging the Governor to include early voting in the budget so that all New Yorkers can have a fairer government where elections are a right accessible to all rather than a burden on working families," Senator Leroy Comrie said.

"Democracy shouldn't be a luxury. It's past time we reformed our state's antiquated voting system. 30 million Americans took advantage of early voting in 2016; sadly, not one was a New Yorker. With voter turnout at a paltry 14% in New York City, we must move swiftly to enact and fully fund early voting this year," Senator Brad Hoylman said.

"Early voting will help expand voting rights so that working New Yorkers have more opportunities to cast their votes and have a say in our election process. We urge Governor Cuomo to put funding for early voting in his budget. It's good for working people, good for our state and good for our democracy," said Hector Figueroa, President of 32BJ SEIU.

"Democracy works best when more New Yorkers are able to effectively participate in our political discourse. Early voting will make voting less complicated for many New Yorkers who have to choose between casting a ballot and work, school, or personal commitments. Early voting and the other reforms will also ease pressure on polling sites, which will make voting more convenient. While we applaud the Governor for proposing these reforms, we hope the Governor and the legislature finally understand the importance of including these reforms in the state budget. An unfunded mandate that places the burden on counties and

municipalities is neither fair nor responsible. The members of Brooklyn Voters Alliance urge Governor Cuomo and the legislature to allocate adequate funding for Early Voting as well as for Automatic Voter Registration,” said Jacques David of the Brooklyn Voters Alliance.

"New York has some of the worst voter turnout rates in the country, long lines, excessive wait times, and low voter confidence. Early voting is a key way to address these problems. It has been shown to boost voter turnout and provide a crucial alternative for voters who can't afford a long wait or can't make it to the polls on Election Day. New York is in the minority of states that have not yet implemented this important reform. It's time for that to change so that more New Yorkers can exercise their right to vote. The Brennan Center urges Governor Cuomo to provide funding for early voting in this year's budget," said Joanna Zdanys, Counsel for the Brennan Center's Democracy Program.

"New York is decades behind at beating back voter suppression," said Jessica Wisneski, Deputy Director of Citizen Action of New York. "Including a strong early voting system in the 2018 state budget is the first step to bringing our election systems out of the dark ages. Governor Cuomo will prove whether or not he is serious about voting rights when he releases his executive budget next week."

“Proposed elections reforms remain a perennial problem in New York State because of, among other reasons, a lack of adequate funding for them in the state budget, leaving the counties to potentially incur the cost of any reforms. Even though the Governor has called for early voting in five of the last six State of the State addresses, it has never made it through the Legislature and funding has never been provided in the state budget, indicating a lack of political will in Albany. Providing funding in the Executive Budget would prove to New Yorkers, who have waited long enough for simple voting reforms, the Governor is serious about implementing early voting in New York State,” said Ethan Geringer-Sameth,

Public Policy and Program Manager for Citizens Union.

“For a so-called progressive state, it’s an embarrassment that New York’s voting laws make it unnecessarily difficult for so many New Yorkers to vote,” said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause. “It’s time for New York to stand up and be a leader in modernizing and expanding voting rights. Common Cause/NY joins the more than 30 diverse organizations from across the state to urge Governor Cuomo to put Early Voting in the budget – it’s up to him to move New York into the present day.”

“Early voting is mandatory to empower New York voters and give them a sufficient amount of time to vote; not just a single day. New York State continues to lag behind other states in terms of voter turnout and participation. Early voting cannot be implemented without funding from the state. We applaud Senator Kavanagh for making early voting a priority issue and for urging the Governor to fund this reform in the state budget,” said Jennifer Wilson, Legislative Director for the League of Women Voters of NYS.

"The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) was pleased to hear Governor Cuomo's proposal to invest in our state's outdated election system and institute early voting in his State of the State Address" said Murad Awawdeh the Vice President of Advocacy at the New York Immigration Coalition. "It has long been a top priority for the NYIC to extend the hours and number of days that the polls are open in order to extend the opportunity to all New Yorkers, regardless of their occupation, business, travel, or studies. In coalition with Let NY Vote, we ask Governor Cuomo to commit to helping ensure constitutional rights across all of our communities by including funding for early voting in the Executive Budget."

Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director said: "New York's voter participation rates are anemic, even in high profile, contested elections. Now is the time to fix NY's democracy. Early voting is part of the solution; it allows busy New Yorkers the flexibility in when they

can vote. The governor can demonstrate his commitment to reinvigorating democracy in New York by funding early voting in his executive budget."

"In a time when we have politicians across the country working overtime to restrict the right to vote, New York must expand and not limit access to the ballot. We believe early voting is an essential step forward in expanding the right to vote. Implementation of early voting needs to be adequately funded to be viable and must be included in the Executive budget," said The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches.

"It's about time that New York catches up with the 37 other states and Washington, D.C. that provide early voting for their residents. Governor Cuomo should put his money where his mouth is and make sure there is funding in the state budget to implement it," said Jonah Minkoff-Zern, Director of the Public Citizen's Democracy Is For People campaign.

"Reform Jewish Voice of New York State (RJV) supports Early Voting and urges the Governor to include funding for it in the Executive Budget," said Marc Landis, RJV Chair.

"New York State's election system was outdated last century and is in desperate need of modernization. Changes like early voting, no-excuse absentee voting, or same day registration to make it easier for people to vote are commonplace in other states, but are resisted in New York. New York should catch up by enacting early voting so voters can vote on days other than Election Day, and put the funding in the budget to ensure it is effectively implemented," said Alex Camarda, Senior Policy Advisor of Reinvent Albany.

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