



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Local reps urge Cuomo administration to release funding for county boards of elections: State aid to help counties meet the increased costs of early voting not being released

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Elmira, N.Y., August 28—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) today urged Governor Andrew Cuomo to release agreed-upon state funding to help counties cover the costs of early voting in 2019.

In a joint statement, O'Mara and Palmesano said, "We're less than two months away from the start of early voting in New York State and counties have been counting on this state funding to help cover the costs. It's been brought to our attention that local county boards of elections are now alarmed that the Cuomo administration appears to be holding back on releasing funding the Legislature approved this year to help our counties implement early voting reforms so that the full burden of this unfunded state mandate doesn't fall on local taxpayers. This funding is critical to the ability of the counties we represent, and counties statewide, to address the increased costs associated with early voting and it should be fully distributed, immediately, like the Legislature intended."

As part of the electoral reforms Cuomo signed into law in January, state voters this fall will be able to begin casting votes on October 26, ten days prior to Election Day on November 5. That means county boards of elections throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and across New York, are in the process of establishing polling sites to cover the anticipated influx of early voters in 2019.

To help counties cover the costs of the new early voting process, the Legislature established a new, \$10-million local grant program as part of the 2019-2020 state budget

Late last week, however, the state Board of Elections, following a conversation with state Division of the Budget (DOB) officials, informed counties that only 20%, or just over \$2 million, of the anticipated \$10 million in grants is being released initially.

The news has left elections officials regionally and statewide wondering when, or if the remainder of the state funding would come their way and, if not, scrambling to figure out how to cover the new costs.

O'Mara and Palmesano added, "County boards of elections were promised this state funding and have been counting on it during their planning for the new early voting process. The Cuomo administration's failure to get this funding out the door is raising alarms locally, and rightly so. If it's not provided, it's going to mean that the full burden of yet another unfunded state mandate will fall on the backs of local property taxpayers."