



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## HELMING: VOTING IMPORTANT FOR OUR COMMUNITY

PAMELA HELMING June 3, 2020



On May 1, 2020, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order (EO) 202.26. This EO includes a number of initiatives impacting school and library district elections. Notably, it ELIMINATES all in-person voting and changes the election to a strictly vote-by-mail process.

Like so many of the EOs issued over the past few months, this guidance has created confusion. As the June 9th school and library elections approach, several unknowns still remain.

For instance, language in the order requires every “eligible” voter to be sent an absentee ballot with a postage paid return envelope. Not only is this wording ambiguous, but it also creates a large financial burden for district taxpayers that have to pay for the printing and postage.

The EO uses the term “eligible voters,” which conflicts with Education Law which speaks only to ‘qualified voters.’ Qualified voter is defined as a citizen, who is at least 18 years of age, living in the district for at least 30 days, and not in conflict with Section 105-6 of Election Law. However, this EO does not require that a voter be currently registered to vote.

For our schools, this inconsistency in terminology has led to confusion, through no fault of their own, as they work to get ballots to local voters. In past elections, fewer than 10% of qualified voters typically participated and voting was done in person at the schools, meaning less costs were associated with the election.

Printing, assembling and mailing thousands of ballots to all “eligible voters” is a substantial financial burden that was not anticipated by our districts. This will add tens of thousands of dollars in unanticipated costs to many budgets.

Additionally, the election date is June 9. With other mail in ballots, they must be POSTMARKED by a certain date. For this election, it has been interpreted that ballots must be received in offices by 5:00 pm on June 9.

The overall implementation of this EO has been inconsistent, largely due to a lack of direction by the Executive. While warned in April that this approach would be confusing, expensive and unwieldy, the Governor chose to remain silent. The State Education Department was not consulted in developing the EO and refused to provide their own guidance.

Despite the unknowns, it is more important than ever that everyone obtains a ballot and mail it back as soon as possible or hand deliver it. If you are a qualified voter and have not received a ballot for your local school board election, I urge you to immediately contact the district and request one.

Let's set a good example for our children and grandchildren and remember to get our votes in, despite this challenging process.