



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

Senator Metzger Questions Witnesses on Ways to Improve Safe Voting and Ballot-Counting Process in Legislative Hearing on the Impact of COVID-19 on Elections

JEN METZGER August 11, 2020

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Hudson Valley and Catskills, NY... Elections and Local Government Committees of the State Senate and Assembly today held a public hearing to review the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 2020 primary elections, evaluate how well New York handled voting during the primary and amidst a pandemic, and identify needed improvements before the November 2020 election. Senator Jen Metzger (SD-42), a member of the Senate Local

Government Committee, questioned NYS Board of Elections (BOE) Commissioner Peter Kosinski, BOE Co-Executive Director Robert Brehm and other witnesses on plans to ensure that county Boards of Elections (BOE) have the technology and resources they need for the upcoming election.

"We need to make sure that every New Yorker can safely exercise this most fundamental democratic right in November, and the purpose to today's legislative hearing was to assess the experience with voting in the June primary, which included a 16-fold increase in absentee voting," **said Senator Jen Metzger**. "We want to make sure our counties and our state are as prepared as possible for the upcoming election amidst the uncertainty created by this pandemic."

Metzger asked BOE Co-Executive Director Robert Brehm whether plans were in place to prioritize the distribution of electronic ballot-counter scanners to help county BOEs efficiently tabulate large numbers of absentee ballots in a timely fashion. Brehm responded that this year well over 75 percent of paper ballots were able to be counted electronically. One county in Metzger's district, Delaware, was still hand-counting ballots in the primary, and Metzger stressed the importance of ensuring that every county can access this technology in time for November.

Metzger also expressed support for deploying dropboxes rather than relying solely on USPS, pointing out that 25 states currently use dropboxes for absentee ballots that are later collected by election officials. BOE Commissioner Peter Kosinski agreed that dropboxes should be considered but suggested that more time would be needed to roll out a plan.

With concern for the cash-strapped counties in her district, Metzger asked representatives to

identify low-to-zero cost measures of highest priority to ensure that New Yorkers can vote safely. Rachel Landy, Co-Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee at New York Democratic Lawyers Council, shared that in her view the number one priority should be mandating a three-day turn-around time by BOEs for receiving absentee ballot applications and mailing out the ballots, as well as ramping up communication efforts to let voters know about both early voting and absentee ballot options. Perry Grossman, Senior Staff Attorney for the Voting Rights Project at the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), recommended extending the deadline for voter registration from 25 days before the election to 10 days before the election, as allowed under the State Constitution. According to the NYCLU, the current deadline left about 93,000 New Yorkers who had registered after the deadline unable to vote in the 2016 presidential election.

In May, the State Legislature passed legislation ([S8130D](#)), now signed into law, that makes it easier to obtain an absentee ballot. The legislation enables registered voters to complete an absentee ballot application online, without a signature. (Voters are still required to sign the actual ballot.) The legislation also extends the deadline by which ballots need to be postmarked, from the day before the election to the day of the election.

Later in the July session, several bills co-sponsored by Metzger related to absentee voting passed the State Legislature, and have since been delivered to the Governor for consideration. [S8783A](#) would temporarily allow the processing of absentee ballot applications prior to 30 days before the election; [S8370B](#) would give voters notice of any deficiencies in their absentee ballot envelopes and an opportunity to fix them; and [S8799A](#) would temporarily provide that any absentee ballot be presumed timely even if it does not bear a dated postmark, as long as the ballot was received and time-stamped by the day after Election Day.

The full archived hearing video can be found [here](#).

Jen Metzger represents the 42nd Senate District, which includes all of Sullivan County and parts of Delaware, Orange, and Ulster Counties. Senator Metzger serves as Chair of the Agriculture Committee and sits on the Environmental Conservation, Education, Health, Energy and Telecommunications, Local Government, Women's Issues, Domestic Animal Welfare, and Legislative Commission on Rural Resources Committees.

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