

**Testimony of Common Cause New York submitted for the
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection
February 13, 2025**

Thank you for allowing Common Cause NY to submit testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded to serve as a vehicle for citizens to make their voices heard in the political process. We fight to strengthen public participation and faith in our institutions of self-government and lead the grassroots component of the nationwide Election Protection effort. Common Cause NY is among the largest and most active state chapters, with thousands of activists throughout the state, and is a founder and leader of the statewide Let NY Vote coalition. Accordingly, the orderly administration of elections and ensuring that our elections are accessible and fair is part of our core mission to promote civic engagement and accountability in government, as is our interest in issues of cybersecurity and federalism.

We are pleased to see the budget allocation made in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget for the State Board of Elections, which we understand covers the amounts requested by the State Board. We are particularly supportive of the Governor's allocation to fully fund the public campaign finance program, including funding the moneys needed to adequately provide matching funds as well as administrative costs. There are two areas where we believe additional funding should be allocated to advance and protect the administration of our elections, as well as a third area beyond elections. We note that the Executive Budget includes and references reallocated moneys from previous years to disburse federal grants previously made for various election-related purposes. We urge the Committee to include a directive to the State Board to expedite the disbursement of any remaining federal grants to ensure that the federal funds are not withdrawn or withheld.

Which leads to our first area of recommendation: allocation of funding to address deficiencies in knowledge and expertise for protecting election systems that will result from the ongoing illegal evisceration of the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)¹. CISA has provided truly unique support, providing security intelligence, knowledge, advice and resources that would not otherwise be available to our state and local election officials. They have been proactive, rather than waiting for election officials to ask for help, creating free tools, guides, assessments and training to allow our election officials to increase both physical and cyber-security and to build resiliency into our election administration at both the state and local level. Accordingly, we strongly recommend that provision be made in the budget to begin to fill the dangerous gap that will be created by the destruction of CISA's election security program. We will work with both houses of the Legislature to assist New York in establishing a state cyber navigator program, which would hire regional cybersecurity experts to aid the state and county boards of elections in assessing the

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.wired.com/story/big-interview-jen-easterly-cisa-cybersecurity/> and <https://cyberscoop.com/cisa-misinformation-disinformation-administrative-leave/>

security of their systems, identifying potential vulnerabilities, and developing tailored strategies to mitigate risks. At least [seven states](#) — Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio — have launched cyber navigator programs in recent years.

When Illinois launched a first of its kind cyber navigator program, the [state spent around](#) \$1.1 million annually on personnel costs for 10 state cybersecurity experts, with another \$62,000 for operating expenses and \$724,000 for start-up equipment.^[1] New York should provide similar funding for launching a cyber navigator program, along with funding for county grants that incentivize participation in the program.

Our second recommendation is to increase the amount allocated to the Office Of Information Technology Services to provide “security and quality control services for state applications and data, and for providing shared services to local municipalities” by at least 25%, to allow that agency to be nimble in stepping up to increase the assistance it provides in cybersecurity, anticipating reduced or completely lacking assistance from CISA and the federal government.

Finally, we recommend that the budget include funding related to New York’s proposed membership in the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC). ERIC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization created by and comprised of state election officials from around the United States. Founded in 2012, ERIC is funded and governed by states that choose to join. New York would be the 26th member of ERIC, joining 24 other states and the District of Columbia.² The Senate has already passed the bill that would require the New York State Board of Elections to join ERIC and we believe that the Assembly will soon follow suit because the benefit of improving the accuracy and security of our voter rolls has become even more important in the current hyper-partisan atmosphere resulting in election-related disinformation. There are one-time and annual membership costs which are modest within the overall context of the total New York State budget, and even within the context of the State Board of Election budget. Nevertheless, we believe that the final budget should provide the funding necessary to participate in ERIC at the earliest practical moment.

The first year costs which would be incurred in the budget year under consideration would be comprised of an initial membership fee of \$25,000 and the first year membership dues which would be calculated depending on the date of New York’s entry into ERIC. Accordingly, we request that the budget includes an allocation which would permit the New York State Board of Elections to spend up to \$200,000 in membership costs over and above its core operational allocation.

² <https://ericstates.org/about/>

