



ELECTION COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK 2024-2025 DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

Testimony before The New York State Assembly & New York State Senate

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Local Government

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Thank you for letting me testify today. My name is Dustin Czarny, and I am an Elections Commissioner in Onondaga County and the Democratic Caucus Chair of the New York State Elections Commissioner Association. NYSECA represents the diverse sixty-two counties throughout New York State. I am proud of our bi-partisan Election Board system, and this is a model that should be followed nationwide. The Democratic and Republican Commissioners must work together to ensure the integrity of our election system. The built-in checks and balances help NY avoid the partisan battles we see unfolding in other States. Commissioners must find ways to put partisan ideologies aside to meet the needs of the voters.

2024 was a unique year for the County Board of Elections throughout New York State. Every presidential election brings stress and high demands to our local Board of Elections. In 2024 we faced the prospect of one of the highest turnout elections in a generation. That is most especially true when it came to Early Voting. 2024 saw a large surge in Early voting throughout the state as New Yorkers took full advantage of this form of voting. The expanded sites implemented 2022 prevented the long lines we saw in 2020 despite the large increase in participation in this form of voting.

We also implemented a new form of mail balloting, Early voting by Mail. New Yorkers were allowed to for the first time choose to vote by mail without having to provide an excuse. This also proved to be a popular measure as large amounts of New Yorkers chose this convenient option. The vote by mail options did far surpass every year on record statewide, though did not reach the levels we saw during the pandemic in 2020. This bodes well for this new method of voting as it likely will grow in popularity the way Early voting did.

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These changes were in addition to the reformation that our electoral landscape has already undertaken. Since 2019 we have implemented election reforms such as Early Voting, Electronic Pollbooks, Universal transfer of registrations. We have revamped a robust system of delivering absentee ballots to voters at the highest volume in NYS history. Implementing a cure system to prevent accidental disenfranchisement of absentee voters over technical deficiencies. We have done all that in the middle of a multi-year pandemic that challenged the very nature of our mostly in-person voting system and put the health of our election workers at risk. While no system that is made up of human workers is without its flaws, our Boards have risen to the challenge and kept our electoral system afloat in New York.

In 2025 the County Board of elections continue to face change. The long-awaited reform of Automatic Voter registration will start its first phase of implementation. This could swell New York voter registration by as much thirty percent over the next few years. We also face the reality of moving many of our local elections to even years. This burden of educating the public and navigating local officials through these changes will fall on local county boards.

The Democratic and Republican commissioners of the NYS Elections Commissioner association believe that New York should move toward annual funding aid for local counties that would take the place of the multiple grant sources we have now. To that end we are requesting for 2025 a \$10 million dollar Aid to locality request. This would supplant the Executive Budget's \$5 million Vote by Mail grant funding. Having more flexibility in individual counties would allow a more efficient use of grant funds from county to county. Some counties may need funds for vote by mail, others may need temporary help, and still others may need equipment and supplies. We also would recommend multi year grants that don't expire at the end of each fiscal year to allow for timing of purchasing equipment and the election calendar.

We have aging electronic poll books that need to be upgraded. The Executive Budget specifically addressed this last year, and I applaud those efforts. Almost all poll books bought in 2019 at the adoption of Early Voting were sixth generation iPad. While these are still serviceable under the current version of IOS (17), there is a strong likelihood when IOS 18 is released later this year it will no longer support sixth generation iPad. We ask this grant to be reallocated in the 2025 budget. Many boards would like to wait for the anticipated iPad 11 expected to be released later this year. The iPad 10 was released in 2022 so waiting for the release of iPad 11 will assure the longest shelf life for our replacement iPad. Reallocating this grant will give the Boards of elections the time they need for this release to happen.

Annual funding support from New York State is more important than ever. The future of federal funding of elections is in serious doubt. New York is one of a handful of states that does

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not have annual funding streams for the local Boards of Elections. Doing so would eliminate the need for annual funding requests and allow for long term planning for Boards of Elections as well as bring parity of service to all citizens of New York no matter where they live.

By establishing annual funding, we can assure that each county will have the resources they need to assure their citizens of the right to vote. In addition to already established reforms New York should provide more guidelines on the proper service level for county Board of Elections. We need to establish minimum staffing levels tied to voter registration rolls for each county Board of Elections. We need mandates for full-time commissioners as our political calendars demand input and guidance year-round. These guidelines can be established and monitored by our State Board of Elections to maintain the independence we need of our Boards of Elections while assuring that counties and New York State give the vital resources for us to accomplish our mission.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify today. I hope that we can count on the legislature's support in defending our democracy here in New York.

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