

Fostering Efficient and Economical Election Administration

Running elections in New York is expensive and challenging, given the varying needs of our diverse counties. Our collective pro-voter organizations support the below measures that will improve election administration by modernizing procedures and easing the burden on counties. We urge the Association to include support for these reforms in its 2017 Legislative Agenda, ensuring that the county boards of elections are positioned to effectively implement 21st century policies to promote voter participation and efficient, reliable election administration.

“Opt-Out” Voter Registration

We recommend that New York State adopt an opt-out system of voter registration (also known as automatic voter registration). Opt-out registration would provide substantial cost savings and administrative benefits and ensure that all eligible New Yorkers are registered to vote. Under an opt-out registration system, county boards of elections automatically and electronically receive the information necessary to add citizens to the voter rolls when they interact with New York State government agencies. It is not mandatory registration: citizens are always provided the opportunity to “opt out,” and no information enters the registration rolls without approval.

Opt-out voter registration has three primary benefits: (1) it increases the accuracy of the rolls, because paperless systems leave less room for human error and because more up-to-date and frequent registration information from voters means outdated or duplicate records can be eliminated; (2) it saves states money because less is spent on staff time, paper processing, and mailing, among other expenses; and (3) it boosts registration rates and turnout.

New York already has a system to electronically transfer voter registration information from the Department of Motor Vehicle offices (“DMV”) directly to election officials. Opt-out registration is the logical next step. It creates a process that is more convenient and less error-prone for voters, government-agency staff, and election officials.

We urge the New York State Election Commissioners Association to support bills that feature these reforms such as the **Voter Empowerment Act, S.2538-C/A.5972-A and automatic voter registration legislation A.6610/ S.5367.**

Implement Electronic Poll Books Statewide

Our groups strongly support replacing printed poll books with electronic poll books to eliminate time and resources spent producing paper poll books and updating voter information, and to **speed up** the processing of voters at the polls on Election Day. In a recent poll, as relayed by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, clerks and administrators put electronic poll books at the top of their election reform priority lists. State and county boards of elections should be guided by positive experiences of the 2014 electronic poll book **pilot projects in Chautauqua and Onondaga counties.** Our groups support designated state-funding for the necessary equipment purchase.

We urge the New York State Election Commissioners Association to support bills that allow counties to elect to use **computer generated registration lists, such as S6581/A8608-A.**

Implement Early Voting in New York State

New York is one of only fourteen states that does not allow early or no-excuse absentee voting, putting us woefully out of step with the rest of the country. Our groups strongly support **no-excuse absentee voting and in-person early voting legislation along the following lines:**

- Early voting **should occur for two weeks** inclusive of two weekends, with at least some weekday voting hours scheduled before and after typical business hours.
- In advance of the first day of the early voting period, **each county should provide public notice** of the days, hours and locations for early voting in that county.

- **Revisions of election procedures** should be implemented to limit costs of early voting, and mechanisms should be implemented to ease administrative burdens, such as the **use of electronic poll books**.
- **There should be state funding** for early voting.
- A **uniform standard** incorporating the variables below should be used to **determine the minimum number of voting sites** for each county. **Counties should have flexibility** to add sites beyond the minimum and should consider the following factors in creating any additional sites:
 - The type of election (primary, general and special as well as the year in which the election is taking place)
 - The voting population or the number of active voters
 - The number of assembly districts, in part or whole, in a county
 - Population density, geography, and the methods and distance of travel for voters to reach potential locations

Revise New York’s Laws to Make Ballots More Voter-Friendly

New York’s arcane ballot design rules should be revised so that New York voters can vote on ballots that are easy to read and understand. New York’s rules are largely intended for old, retired lever voting machines and are unduly complicated for the way we vote today. Design standards will assist counties in designing ballots that deliver **clear instructions**, demarcate races and candidates effectively, and eliminate “split contests” where candidates for a single office spill over onto more than one row, increasing the risk of inadvertent overvotes. Absent changes to state law, counties should explore redesigning the ballot to increase font size to the extent possible and other administrative changes.

We urge the New York State Election Commissioners Association to support bills that feature these reforms such as the **Voter Friendly Ballot Act, A.3389-B**.

Upgrade Poll Workers Recruitment/Training and Websites

One of the most common challenges facing all boards of elections is the recruitment and training of poll workers. We strongly urge state and county boards of elections to work together to develop ways to increase and diversify the number of poll workers, and improve their training. We urge county boards of elections to take advantage of the 2010 election law amendment allowing split shifts for poll workers. Urban county boards of election should develop programs for recruiting municipal workers – and high school and college students – to serve as poll workers. We recommend that poll workers be trained to assist voters with ballot marking devices so all voters can vote privately and independently.

We believe that all New York county boards of elections should have websites that are maintained all year and offer access to election information for county residents. We support budget lines to provide such online information.

We believe that additional reform measures should be added to strengthen our voter registration system including the following:

- **Make registration portable** so voters who submit required information to government officials **stay on the rolls** when they move within the state or change their names.
- **Create an Election Day fail-safe** to allow a voter who registers at a government agency, but whose name does not appear on the voter registration list, to cast a ballot that counts.
- **Shorten the deadline for registration** to ten days before an election.
- Allow **pre-registration of 16 and 17 year-olds to vote**; research indicates that this reform can help to create life-long voters.
- **Expand the current DMV program to permit all eligible voters to register over the internet.**
- **Provide state funding** for modernizing voter registration, including internet registration and electronic transmission by agencies, in the state budget.

Our groups look forward to working in partnership with NYSECA to improve New York’s elections and increase access to the polls.