

**SUBJECT:** Senate Virtual Roundtable

**PURPOSE:** to discuss legislation to improve the design and operation of the NYC Board of Elections

**DATE:** December 11, 2020

**FROM:** League of Women Voters of NYS

County BOEs did heroic work under challenging times.

In spring they handled the weekly Executive Orders changing how to send out and accept absentee ballots.

In fall, different methods again on top of early voting with long lines and much confusion, in addition to implementing a new curing process for questioned ballots. This worked fine in some counties, but not all.

Local Leagues met with many of the county BOEs and helped where possible in communications on the changes and how to vote safely and easily.

But, lack of consistency around the state and lack of adequate funding caused different results in different counties.

Although this round table is specifically related to NYC, as a representative of a state-wide organization I want to highlight the need for uniform BOE reforms for all 62 counties in New York.

Certainly, Albany voters would have just as much to gain from a uniform, open, and transparent county board of elections as a voter in Brooklyn or Queens.

My colleague, Kate Doran, will be discussing the specific aspects of this New York City specific legislation but in the future the League would hope to see state-wide county board of elections reform that would include:

1. Staffing and salary standards that include mandating commissioners serve as full time employees and that counties provide adequate funds to hire experienced staff;
2. Transparency and accountability in the CBOE decision making and operational processes that includes regularly scheduled open meetings, transparency in election results reporting, and a directive to maintain accurate and up to date public information on their websites and social media;
3. And finally, uniform standards and practices that allows the State Board of Elections to serve as an oversight authority to safeguard compliance with these procedures.

These three changes will address the dysfunction and inefficiency within certain county boards of elections.

As my colleague Jennifer Wilson has said the League is interested in a statewide transformation of our Boards of Election. But as we all understand a fundamental change will likely require a Constitutional Amendment. We welcome such conversations, and look forward to the research, and collaboration that will ensue.

Here today, we are supporting a smaller preliminary foray into the larger reform. Thank you for your courage in introducing this legislation, and for inviting us to speak.

The NYC BOE stands uniquely apart from all other Boards of Election in the state. Not only is it mentioned specifically in Election Law, but the NYC BOE is a behemoth compared to any other BOE. There is also no transparency. For example I am not sure it is possible to know just how many people work at any of the 5 Borough Offices at any given point in time. The Annual Report produced by the NYC BOE lists only the Chiefs and Deputies in the pages describing “Borough Offices.”

We support S2726A in that it would provide an express allocation of powers and duties for Commissioners, and the Executive Director & Deputy Executive Director. We welcome the measure of accountability in the bill that we read in the requirement that the “Chief Executive,” consult with DCAS to establish written policies and procedures with respect to employment.

Some have said that this legislation does not go far enough. We think that it is an excellent start. Change in NYC can point the way for change in the surrounding suburban counties, and then throughout the state.

