



ELECTION COMMISSIONERS' ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK 2018-2019

TESTIMONY FOR LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING 2019-2020 Monday February 11, 2019/ Local Government Officials/General Government *Submitted by Darlene Harris, President of NYSECA*

At the time of this request we wish we had a dollar figure, which could adequately reflect the anticipated costs facing each and every county caused by the introduction of Early Voting in New York. Regardless of whether the counties recoup these costs from the cities, towns and villages they serve, it will have an immediate impact to all municipality budgets during the current fiscal year and for years to come. Introducing an unfunded mandate of this magnitude would be detrimental enough for future budgets, but to do so mid-cycle places municipalities in a particularly precarious situation. These costs are real and will be ongoing for the length of time early voting exists in New York – there will be no such thing as a cost payoff in a decade, as noted by some. The assumption that consolidating the primaries would produce enough savings to offset the costs associated with early voting is a complete falsehood. Of the elections reforms enacted this year, the one that forces the highest demand for additional funds is Early Voting.

Broken down there are three main areas where we will see an increase in cost:

INSPECTOR STAFF INCREASED COSTS

What we can say thus far is that counties will have increases in staff for early voting. Each county may or may not be able to use their own staff and offices to conduct early voting for a variety of reasons. You cannot expect office staff to go off location for the nine day stretch that is being proposed. County office buildings and Board of Election offices were not designed to hold elections on the scale that Early Voting will bring about. Therefore additional personnel will have to be hired to staff poll sites for the duration of early voting.

Increased staff quantities to cover the nine day event are even harder to determine. We are required by the new legislation to staff such, “that no voter waits longer than 30 minutes,” as this is the first year of rollout we will not know how many voters will utilize the early voting. It has been discussed that there may be a “novelty effect” voting this year, meaning that people will vote early simply because they can and it is new, hence we will need to potentially overstaff until we get a median count of how many voters will participate in Early Voting.

We have the capacity within the new legislation to break up our vote centers to be more accommodating for the voter. We can then isolate what voters vote where, possibly easing the burden of having 100% of all ballot styles available at any additional sites. Some counties, due to geographic make up, such as a 50 or 75 mile drive to a vote center may want to offer more sites than required. Again, each county will have a unique and particular manner by which they carry out the early voting process. More sites mean more staff and thus greater cost. As just a simple example, the Early Voting legislation stipulates that there be one vote center for every 50,000 registered active/inactive voters. At bare minimum, statewide county enrollment would warrant approximately 150 vote centers. Each vote Center would need anywhere from eight inspectors to dozens at each, again, approximately paying each inspector \$200 a day.

150 vote centers X 12 inspectors = 1800 inspectors

1800 X \$200 = \$360,000 / day

\$360,000 X 9 days = \$3,240,000 per early voting event

Additionally, that amount does not include Board of Elections staff overtime for working nights and weekends, nor for other part time staff such as technicians who deliver equipment and are on hand throughout the day to address issues in the field and retrieve items at the end of the day.

This year that is one event, next year we will have three Early Voting Sessions.

POLL SITE RENTAL

The proposed voting process allows for vote centers where thousands or tens of thousands will need to be accommodated. Some county boards will have to resort to voting in malls or large conference centers, locations that we have never used on Election Day and again, certainly not for nine days. Although, it is assumed that we can potentially use our own offices as a site, as mentioned, many of our offices just do not have the requisite amount of space or functionality. We need a place that can accommodate hundreds or thousands of voters, it needs to be accessible, have ample parking and allow us to take over the space for the extended period of time. If we are using large venues such as a conference center, where we are using space that they might have been able to rent out, those rents might be at a premium versus a rent that solely covers the heat, lights and staff to open and close the sites for multiple days. This additional rental cost or costs have not been considered in this year's budget and quite frankly, commissioners are just starting to call these sites to see what their options are. Many counties do not currently pay their polls sites for the one day use. A large number of polls sites let us use their facility on Election Day, to cover costs they will offer a bake sale or other income bearing activity to cover heat, light and building staff costs. But, if we ask them to stay open for us for

nine days there may be new arrangements, which might now include rent. We do have the ability to utilize other public sites, which receive federal tax dollars - town halls, schools, fire houses and more. However, it may not be feasible for us to be in these locations for a lengthy period of time due to the needs of the constituencies they serve. For instance, if we use the courtroom at a town hall, they would have to modify their court schedules to accommodate us for the nine days. We do not believe that we will convince them to do that for us, nor should we ask those waiting for court dates to put their life on hold. This will force us to find different locations, locations that will charge rent.

ELECTRONIC POLL BOOKS

With Early Voting, a process must be put in place to prevent voters from voting multiple times. As voters come to vote over the course of the nine day time period, records will need to be maintained and this information must be known on Election Day. This brings about the need for electronic poll books. E-poll books facilitate real time information to identify voters, their correct polling stations, and/or ballots and prevent duplicate voting.

Although not yet certified as to the specifications needed as of this date, we have been presented with rates of anywhere from \$1,200 to \$3,000 a unit, this would potentially include the software. The voting data collected at all of the poll sites for Early Voting must be uploaded and then made available to all of the Election Day poll sites. Early voting ends on Sunday, therefore all of the data must be brought back to the home site, placed in the E-Poll Book and shipped to all of the poll sites used on Election day. There will be increased costs just for that quick turn-around, including staff and shipping costs above and beyond the current costs. Most shipping is done in the days prior to the Election and will be happening while Early Voting is still underway. This late delivery will be an extra trip to the sites. These E-Poll books are electronic based equipment, similar to a laptop or tablet.

As a simple model:

There are 15,529 Election districts statewide. (Includes NYC) If we use the median price of \$2,000 per unit:

$$15,529 \times 2,000 = \$31,058,000$$

This would be the potential start-up cost of outfitting our counties with electronic poll books.

We all know that the life-cycle of this equipment does not last forever, so let's say in five to eight years we may need to upgrade these units, so this cost would be recurring. If a county chooses to allow voters to vote at any of their Early Vote sites, they will need e-poll book connectivity. Some of our counties do not currently have proper internet connectivity, our rural or outlying counties struggle with access to this feature. If it is required to have an internet

connection, these counties may have to purchase technology to circumvent the lack of Wi-Fi or other connection. There will also have to be software purchases, ongoing maintenance and support contracts, and additional media that would add to the costs.

Some additional equipment that may need to be purchased are storage containers for the paper ballots that are to remain at the sites over the nine day period. These will have to be sturdy and secure to prevent any tampering when unattended. Additional cabinets and other items may need be added to the list as we breakdown the security measures that are to be in place.

Some counties will require on site or on demand ballot printers. Shipping all the various ballot styles to a site in paper form may be cumbersome and unwieldy; a printer that can print out the ballot for each voter as they arrive may work better and reduce print costs. Our larger counties may need to have multiple printers to accommodate the crowds. All of this additional equipment will be costs incurred outside of the standard operation of conducting Early Voting.

CONCLUSION

Even though the conversation of having Early Voting in New York State is not a new one, we are still at the cusp of trying to figure out the costs and assign the direct impact on our county budgets. The bottom line is that 100% of the newly incurred costs will be pushed out to the taxpayers of New York in one shape or form, but the current model calls for counties to bear this extra burden – these additional costs can be deemed an unfunded mandate. Currently there is no money set aside for the counties in the current budget proposal to ease a bit of this hit. We look to you, our state legislators, to do what is right for the voters of this state and fund the legislation you have passed in their name to ease the burdens of life. We thank you for your consideration.