



Testimony of Reinvent Albany for the Joint Legislative Hearing on Public Protection

February 10, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for this hearing. Reinvent Albany advocates for transparent, accountable New York government.

Board of Elections Needs Additional Funding for Campaign Finance Implementation and Better Election Administration

We urge the Legislature to provide funding for the state's new public campaign finance program in both one-house budgets (the funding was included in the Governor's executive budget proposal).

This funding is essential now as the state has lost a year to prepare due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the state's public financing program does not officially begin until the 2023-2024 election cycle, the State Board of Elections (SBOE) needs funding now to develop technology for the program and hire the appropriate staff. The election disasters of 2020 showed us what can happen when agencies are given insufficient funds and little time to prepare.

Boards of elections' funding needs go beyond campaign finance: Last year, local boards across the state were so strapped that [they sought funding from a Facebook-funded charity](#). It is unsurprising, given boards' limited resources, that there continue to be so many headlines about election failures in our state. Both the Governor and the legislature must provide greater funding for the state and local boards.

One recent example of the SBOE's inadequate funding is the newly launched campaign finance Public Reporting System. The portal was eight years in the making, yet somehow the State Board of Elections produced a system that is virtually unusable, as we and six other watchdog groups noted last week [in a letter to the SBOE](#). It is likely that the SBOE's limited resources during the pandemic hampered their efforts to build the portal. The SBOE had to dedicate its personnel to dealing with the unexpected demand for absentee ballots and surge in early voters.

Funding Will Promote Better Transparency

That's why funds must be set aside to ensure our elections are truly transparent, particularly now that the public campaign finance system is under development. A functional campaign finance portal allows the public to find conflicts of interest and see how private interests may be influencing the actions of public officials. The Board could also use funding to build a better back-end so that data systems are modern and able to be exported via application programming interface (API). This would simplify the process of placing information in the open data portal as required by Governor Cuomo's [Executive Order 95](#), which states, "All covered State entities shall make their Publishable State data available on the Open Data Website." The Board of Elections is a covered state entity, yet has not placed all of its publishable state data in the portal.

We recognize that many of the aforementioned issues have as much to do with elections administration as they do with funding, and we agree with calls from watchdog groups across the state to pass a constitutional amendment replacing the SBOE with a nonpartisan, professional agency.

Support for Election Reform Legislation

In addition to the above, Reinvent Albany calls for the legislature to include the following bills in the budget:

- [S516 \(Gianaris\)](#)/**(no same-as)**, which establishes deadlines for absentee ballot processing. This bill has passed the Senate. We support the League of Women Voters' proposal that this legislation be included in the budget.
- [S4658 \(Parker\)](#)/**(no same-as)**, which requires polling places on college campuses in certain election districts.

We would also like to reiterate our support for the passage of the constitutional amendments that would establish same-day registration ([S517/A502](#)) and no-excuse absentee voting ([S360/A4431](#)).

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Please contact Tom Speaker at tom [at] reinventalbany.org should you have any questions.