



ELECTION COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK 2025-2026 DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

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

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Local Government

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Dustin M. Czarny, NYSECA Democratic Caucus Chair, Commissioner (D) Onondaga County

Thank you for the opportunity to 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 needs of all sixty-two counties across New York State.

I am proud of our bipartisan county Board of Elections system, which serves as a model that should be followed nationwide. Democratic and Republican commissioners work together to ensure the integrity of our election system. These built-in checks and balances help New York avoid the partisan battles unfolding in other states. Commissioners must continually find ways to put partisan ideologies aside in order to meet the needs of voters.

The year 2025 marked the end of an era for county Boards of Elections across New York State. The transformative Even Year Election Law will take effect beginning in 2026, with many local offices transitioning to federal election years. Town and county offices affected by the law will be fully seated in even-numbered years between 2026 and 2030. As these offices transition, Boards of Elections will face unique challenges. More offices and increased competition in federal years will result in longer ballots—potentially two-page ballots in some jurisdictions. The year 2026 is already shaping up to be unique. Evidence from 2025 and special elections across the country suggests that 2026 may resemble a presidential election year more than a typical midterm in terms of turnout and intensity. County budgets for 2026 are usually adopted in the final quarter of the previous year, meaning many counties may be unprepared for unanticipated costs resulting from the Even Year Election Law transition and increased election intensity.

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Since 2019, New York has implemented major election reforms, including Early Voting, electronic poll books, and universal voter registration transfers. We have also developed a robust vote-by-mail system, including the addition of Early Vote by Mail. These reforms have resulted in some of the highest vote-by-mail volumes outside of the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Additionally, we implemented a cure process to prevent the accidental disenfranchisement of absentee voters due to technical deficiencies. While no system staffed by human workers is without flaws, our Boards of Elections have risen to the challenge and maintained a strong and reliable election system in New York.

The Democratic and Republican commissioners of the New York State Elections Commissioner Association believe New York should move toward annual funding for local Boards of Elections, replacing the multiple grant sources currently in place. To that end, we are requesting \$35 million in Aid to Localities funding for 2026. Greater flexibility at the county level would allow for more efficient use of funds. Some counties may need resources for vote-by-mail operations, others may require temporary staffing assistance, and still others may need equipment or supplies. We also recommend multi-year grants that do not expire at the end of each fiscal year, allowing counties to align purchasing decisions with election and procurement timelines. Many counties are also operating with aging electronic poll books that need to be replaced. The Executive Budget has addressed this issue in recent years, and I commend those efforts. Most poll books purchased in 2019 during the rollout of Early Voting were sixth-generation iPads. While these devices remain serviceable under the current version of iOS 17, counties are preparing to transition to iOS 26, which no longer supports fifth- and sixth-generation iPads. These devices will need to be replaced ahead of the June 2026 primary. We respectfully request that this grant funding be reallocated in 2026 to provide Boards of Elections with the necessary time and flexibility to complete this transition.

Annual state funding support is more important than ever. The future of federal election funding is uncertain, and New York is among the few states that does not provide annual funding streams for local Boards of Elections. Establishing such funding would eliminate the need for recurring annual requests, enable long-term planning, and ensure parity of service for voters across the state, regardless of where they live.

By establishing annual funding, New York can ensure that every county has the resources necessary to protect the right to vote. In addition to existing reforms, the state should provide clearer guidelines for minimum service levels at county Boards of Elections. This includes establishing staffing minimums tied to voter registration levels and mandating full-time commissioners, as modern political calendars require year-round engagement and oversight. These standards can be established and monitored by the State Board of Elections, preserving

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the independence of local Boards while ensuring counties and the state provide the resources necessary to fulfill our mission.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I hope we can count on the Legislature's continued support in defending our democracy here in New York.

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