



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

## Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr., Elections Committee Chair, Advances Election Reforms

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR April 27, 2010

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### SENATOR JOSEPH P. ADDABBO, JR., ELECTIONS COMMITTEE CHAIR, ADVANCES ELECTION REFORMS

Senator Joseph P. Addabbo Jr., in his capacity as Chair of the Senate Elections Committee, is continuing his rapid pace of moving election reform and modernization legislation through his committee, and successfully securing the passage of bills that encourage voter participation and ensure that they can vote despite being unable to physically get to the polls.

On April 14, 2010, the Senate passed a package of five election reform bills designed to make absentee voting easier, and improve the affidavit voting process and election administration. These bills highlight Senator Addabbo's and the Elections Committee's commitment to an inclusive, reliable and effective electoral process that works for all New Yorkers and inspires confidence that their votes matter.

"The Elections Committee has made common sense reforms that eliminate obstacles to voting a priority, because voters should never be given any reason to question the importance of their role in the selection and election of their representatives", said Addabbo. "And, certainly, they should never feel that their safety or security might be compromised by their exercise of their right to vote."

In March, the Senate passed legislation sponsored by Addabbo to modernize the election law and administration practices by clarifying how voters can cast a write-in vote when their favored candidate is not on the ballot (S6908), giving boards of elections the flexibility to provide whatever writing instruments will work best with the new paper ballots instead of lead pencils (S6907), and eliminating references to obsolete punch card ballot use, which caused so much trouble in Florida in the 2000 Presidential election (S6906). "As we move into a new era of voting with paper ballots and an optical scan machine, it is important that we give our dedicated boards of election the tools and flexibility they need to make the voters' experience when voting as easy as possible", said Addabbo.

The senator continued, "Anybody, who has ever wanted to vote but knew they would be out of town on election day, or unable to go to the polls for health reasons, knows how complicated the application for an absentee ballot has been." The law required that voters disclose the dates they would be away and the reasons, and, if a voter was ill or physically unable to go to the polls, it required disclose the practitioner who advised that. According to Addabbo that because of these onerous and cumbersome requirements, many eligible voters

chose not to vote by absentee ballot. "No voter should ever be afraid to vote because it would compromise their safety or security. The Senate's passage of my bill (S2868B) rights this wrong," said Addabbo. "In the future, voters will only need to state under oath that they will be out of the county on election day or unable to vote in person."

Addabbo stated that he "...was also gratified that the Senate also took a step towards moving our boards of elections into the Internet age by passing my bill (S3252) to allow voters to provide an email address when they register to vote, and then receive notice of elections by both first class mail and email." The senator observed that "for many young voters and for an increasing number of older ones as well, email is not only a primary form of communication that gets more attention than paper, but it is also connected to the calendars they maintain on their computers and cell phones, which keep them aware of their planned daily activities."

"The Senate made voter registration easier by passing legislation (S5988) that provides for a dual affidavit ballot, voter registration and change of enrollment," said Senator Addabbo. It provides that when a voter attempts to vote but is not properly registered, the voter's affidavit ballot will serve as a voter registration, and the voter will be properly registered for the next election. And, it made obtaining an absentee ballot easier, and reduced the turnaround time for receiving one, by passing legislation that allows voters to request an absentee ballot by fax.

Addabbo also noted that "the Senate's bill package also included one of mine (S6010), which promotes administrative efficiency by allowing the state board of elections to determine how notification is to be given of a change of address, and by requiring that candidates who file campaign disclosure reports provide the name and address of the bank where they maintain their campaign accounts."

"After a long period when precious little was done to keep up with changes in election practices and bring our electoral process into the modern age, there is much work to be done, and I am moving as fast as possible to do it. And, I am thankful for the support the Senate has provided for my efforts." Addabbo added. The Elections Committee has recently held hearings on several campaign finance reforms bills, which will reduce contribution limits and the impact that fundraising has on our elections. To the greatest extent possible, Addabbo intends to make it easier for qualified citizens to vote, increase their participation in the electoral process, and restore their confidence that their votes matter, and that our elections are fair and not controlled by powerful, wealthy interests. "No eligible citizen should have to overcome obstacles or intimidation in order to exercise their most fundamental right, or be made to feel that their vote does not matter. That is simply unacceptable in our democratic society, and I will do everything in my power to prevent it from occurring and to eliminate it if it does." Addabbo concluded.