



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Introduces Legislation Requiring NYS Boards of Elections to Send Absentee Ballots to All New Yorkers During COVID-19 Pandemic

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April 20, 2020

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BUFFALO, NY – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) has introduced new legislation that would require NYS Boards of Elections to mail an absentee ballot to every qualified voter at the address at which they are registered during a state disaster emergency. The legislation was drafted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many express concerns over New Yorkers gathering at in-person polling sites at a time when social distancing is being prioritized to help curb the spread of the coronavirus. Under the bill, the Boards of Elections would be required to mail absentee ballots no later than 30 days before any election scheduled during a state disaster emergency. The legislation has quickly gained support from legislators across New York, with 18 cosponsors signing on within the first few days.

“Many New Yorkers are already feeling overwhelmed during this unprecedented time in modern history. They shouldn’t also have to worry about jeopardizing their safety because they want to exercise their right to vote in an election,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “While New York works around the clock to protect public health, we also need to ensure that we’re protecting civic responsibilities. Through this bill, we’re encouraging voter participation through a safe and thoughtful process, and ensuring people still have their voices heard in our democracy.”

In late March, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an Executive Order moving New York’s presidential primary from April 28 to June 23. In early April, he announced through a second Executive Order that all New Yorkers will now have the ability to vote by mail through absentee ballot. Kennedy’s legislation would take this action

one step further, streamlining the process for voter participation by removing any obligation for New Yorkers to request an absentee ballot on their own.

Before this Executive Order was issued, New Yorkers could only vote by absentee ballot if they met one of a number of defined criteria, including but not limited to: being absent from New York at a time of the election, inability to vote due to temporary or permanent illness or disability, or if an individual is a resident or patient at a VA hospital. Now, an absentee ballot can be granted for any election held on or before June 23 with the reason being the potential of contraction of COVID-19. Cuomo's Executive Order was announced a day after Wisconsin held its primaries at in-person polling sites during the pandemic, and received national criticism for limiting voters' ability to send in ballots by mail.

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