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My name is Mark Matt, I live in the Village of Fayetteville, NY in Onondaga County.

The village of Fayetteville elections for Mayor and two trustees was scheduled for March of 2020. Petitions were circulated by candidates and collected by the village earlier in 2020 as it was done by many villages across New York state. The Pandemic then delayed the election until September 2020.

Village elections are not governed by NYS Election Law. They are run according to village law. Basically, the village elected and appointed officials run the elections that fill their seats.

In September of 2020, the village of Fayetteville election was held. There were no appropriate instructions available for voters to cast a write-in vote. The ballots did not include directions specifying how to cast a write-in vote. At the election site on election day, village officials, when verbally asked, could not provide instructions to voters on how to submit a write-in vote. In addition, the ballots, all paper, were placed in a trash can for collection to be counted. Not the most encouraging visual for voters.

The write-in candidates did not win, which may not be unusual but the fairness and transparency of the voting process came into question. Many residents were not confident in the election and placed pressure on village officials to improve the process.

I personally spoke with village officials in July and suggested that they contract with the county BOE to run the village elections. The county BOE has extensive training and a bipartisan approach that can't be matched by village officials.

In the last few weeks, the village listened and agreed. They have moved to have the village of Fayetteville conduct it's elections by the county BOE, for the first time, next March. Under NYS village law, they are not required to do this.

This is not without a cost. The village election is normally held in March and the County BOE must charge for election services to the village. In our Onondaga county, only a handful of villages choose to pay this fee from their budget.

In New York State County BOE's are funded by county government. In my Onondaga county, I believe they restrict BOE funding in order to restrict BOE activities. Onondaga county continues to restrict the number of early voting sites, and we have the lowest number of sites per voter in New York state. The county also charges villages to provide fully fair and transparent village elections.

My position is that NYS should fully fund all County BOE's and insure that counties cannot reduce fair access to elections and villages can provide fair and transparent elections without being charged a fee. Both of these changes would encourage democracy at the local level.
