



## **Superintendent's Office**

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Michael P. Nagler, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

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Good morning chairpersons Gallivan and Askhar and members of the committee. My name is Michael Nagler; I am the Superintendent of Mineola Public Schools as well as the President of the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents. I would like to thank Senator Phillips for inviting me to share my thoughts on voting in schools, student safety and the Superintendent's role in 'granting permission' for sex offenders to vote in school buildings.

In my 32 years as an educator, student safety has always been my top priority. The tragic and more frequent occurrences of school shootings have caused our school communities to demand stricter policies and procedures and a 'hardening' of our buildings.

Districts have spent hundreds and thousands of dollars in capital work on security upgrades that could include items like: creating single point entries, "man traps", electronic ID portals, panic and lockdown buttons, security bollards and in some cases armed guards. We have reached a point where we basically don't let our parents in the building without reason or sufficient purpose. That is the new norm.

So using schools as polling places is a glaring contradiction to these endeavors. Polling places require open access to the building, we cannot require ID checks, and if we cannot isolate an area for polling - we can have people wandering around the building. Voting in schools make schools unsafe. When my colleagues and I have raised these concerns with the Board of Elections their response is to offer to help us find a secure area in the building. Mineola's answer has been to find a classroom with an exterior door and hold elections in that room. I have hired additional security to insure voters don't wander into buildings. When I visited the polling places during the primaries earlier this month I was besieged with complaints from the poll workers and some voters about the accommodations. While not ideal, the current practice gives us some semblance of security- even with these procedures in place we had an incident in a bathroom in September.

When children are not in the building voting is a non-issue. It is a fairly common practice for schools to close on Election Day, although two years ago, Mineola was open and had children in attendance. The reason we had to open was the restriction on start and end dates for schools as well as the contractual obligations in our collective bargaining agreements. In addition,

many districts have decided to close for additional religious holidays, thereby decreasing the number of available school days. I mention this because of Senator's Funke's bill that proposes requiring schools to close on Election Day. This bill would place further exasperate a problematic situation. Moreover, the bill doesn't account for primary elections nor does it address the discussion in recent legislative sessions about early voting.

Lastly I would like to comment on what precipitated this hearing - parolees and voting in schools - particularly convicted sex offenders. The notion that Superintendents should grant permission for convicted sex offenders to vote in our buildings is ridiculous. No Superintendent is going to agree to that and to place that decision in our laps isn't fair. I am aware the law dates back to 2006 - it didn't make sense then nor does it make sense now. We don't want any part of this political hot potato especially when the obvious solution is simply using an absentee ballot. Frankly, I believe it is a complete disregard for school communities.

What we are asking for is the ability to work with the Board of Elections to find alternate sites for polling. We support Senator Phillips bill (s.9155) to give schools the ability to decline to serve as polling places, similar to the discretion now allowed to other entities. My colleagues and I are prepared to work with the Board of Elections to find alternative sites such as fire house, village halls and libraries. At this point, based on our current circumstances, those venues make more sense.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify