

New Hyde Park Memorial High School PTSA

**Public Hearing, Hicksville (Nassau County) October 2, 2018
Senate Standing Committees on Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections
and Elections**

Oral Testimony

By

**James J. Reddan
Corresponding Secretary, NHPMHS PTSA
NHP-GCP Committee against Polling in our Schools**

**NHPMHS PTSA-Danielle Messina, Liz Sollecito, Co-Presidents
NHP-GCP Committee against Polling in our Schools,
Kathryn Canese, Danielle Messina, James Reddan and Liz Sollecito
500 Leonard Boulevard
New Hyde Park, NY 11040**

Good Morning, my name is James Reddan. My proudest titles are husband, Dad, and Veteran, US Army. I appear before you today to offer testimony on the topic of elections. Specifically polling in our schools and Executive Order 181. I have been authorized by vote of the membership to express the opinion of the NHP-GCP Committee Against Polling in our Schools and the NHPMHS PTSA. I am a member of the committee and the Corresponding Secretary for the PTSA. Here with me today are Danielle Messina, Liz Sollecito and Kathryn Canese these talented women are the driving force behind the committee and the PTSA.

Before I begin my testimony on Executive Order 181 and the subject of polling in our schools, I would like to thank Chairperson Sen. Patrick Gallivan, Chairperson Frederick Akshar and my NYS Sen Elaine Phillips for the opportunity to address the two committees and you my fellow citizens. Sen. Phillips, TONH Councilperson Angelo Ferrara, Nassau County Legislator Richard Nicoletto and Assemblymen Ed Ra have ~~been~~ all been instrumental in our mission to remove polling from our schools. I believe it is important to thank the people that help you reach your goals so thank you all.

The New Hyde Park- Garden City Park community began its fight against polling in our schools before our governor signed Executive Order 181. Our issue is and always has been the safety of our children. For many years three of our elementary schools were polling locations. It was acceptable in the past, but times have changed.

Our story begins on election day, 2014. On that day at New Hyde Park Road School the alarm was triggered, and a lockdown was initiated. Our children, teachers and staff were locked in the school for about two hours. Everyone huddled in a locked office or classroom, waiting for the all clear. Every teacher and administrator complying with the School Safety Plan. The Nassau County Police 3rd Precinct did an excellent job and secured the school. However, during the lockdown the election process continued. Voters and poll workers were free to roam portions of the school, enter and leave as they pleased thus defeating the purpose and intent of a lockdown. We decided on that day, polling in our schools is unacceptable and a potential security threat. Our community organized a

petition drive and we were successful in removing the election day polling from New Hyde Park Road School. Unfortunately, voting remained in the Manor Oaks and Hillside Grade Schools. The vote at Manor Oaks was under the control of school board. In May of 2017 the NHP-GCP UFSD moved its budget and trustee vote out of Manor Oaks School and into Michael J. Tully Park.

Though the collective efforts of concerned residents in our community we have been successful in facilitating the removal of polling from Hillside Grade School. Our elementary schools were no longer subject to the potential the safety threat. The School Safety Plan would no longer be compromised by the election process. For that we thank everyone that helped us and the Nassau County Board of Elections.

We breathed a sigh of relief. The Board of Elections was offered two reasonable locations. The NHP Fire District offered the use of their fire houses as an alternative polling location. We also secured Michael J. Tully Park as an optional site. The NHP-GCP School District holds their Budget and Trustee vote at Tully Park. The site is an approved voting location. Simple we thought. Tully Park is tax payer funded, handicap

accessible, offers a large parking field and is a well-known and convenient location within our community. After offering these locations as alternatives the Board of Election surveyed the locations. Progress.....we waited for a decision. We waited all summer. We became aware of the new location when the Board of Elections mailed out Voter Registration Cards. Unfortunately, The Board of Elections selected NHPMHS for the September 13th primary vote and the November 6 General Election vote. We were shocked. What could we do now. The cards were mailed. The location selected. The primary is two weeks away. We fought back is what we did, we made calls, sent emails and let our voices be heard to any one that would listen. Thankfully someone did listen. The Board of Elections changed the location of the primary. They moved it to Tully Park one of our original alternative locations. This move occurred one week before the primary vote. Again, a collective sigh of relief. But we are not done, our mission is not complete. The Board of Election has selected NHPMHS as the voting location for the November 6, election. The selection of the high school as an alternative to the elementary schools is baffling to us. The same children that attend our elementary schools have brothers and sisters that attend the high

school. The same families and friends are affected. Today as I speak to you 1860 children ages 11 through 18 are attending NHPMHS. 1860 children, our children. The selection of the high school as a polling location is unacceptable and unnecessary. I have been voting for 39 years, NHPMHS has never been a polling location during that time. We are pleading with the Nassau County Board of Elections to utilize Tully Park on November 6. The same park that was used by the Board of Elections to conduct the Sept 13, primary elections.

I told our story because you and I should not have to fight to remove voting from our schools. We shouldn't have to compromise the safety of our children because of an election. The perceived inconvenience of moving a polling location should not be more important than our children. There are alternatives. We should be afforded a sensible solution, give the individual school districts the legal authority to opt out. Before I continue about a possible opt out option I would like to comment on Executive Order 181.

Executive Order 181 went into effect on May 1 of this year. The order could potentially give the right to vote

to tens of thousands of felons on parole. The order would give the parolees the right to vote prior to their completing their term of parole. The governor says the parolees are disenfranchised voters, that many of them are contributing to society and it is unfair to prevent them from voting. There is no doubt that some parolees will become productive members of society. People make mistakes. NYS law has a way for parolees to restore their right to vote. It is called a Relief from Civil Disabilities. It is granted by a judge. It is also true that there are paroles that will never change. Some of those parolees are convicted sexual predators. Allowing them to vote also allows them the right to enter our schools during an election. To enter the schools in NHP-GCP school district you need to produce identification. If you don't have identification you don't get in. During an election, schools must open up their doors to the voting public. Schools are not allowed to ask voters for identification. They have no record of who enters the building during an election. So, it is more than possible that a sexual predator will feel emboldened by this executive order and will enter one of our schools or wanders around outside just waiting for the opportunity to harm one of our children. That is unacceptable. My community wanted elections out

of our schools before Executive Order 181, now we believe it is imperative. In the near future thanks to Senator Phillips it may be possible for our schools to opt out.

Selecting a school as a polling location for elections poses a serious potential threat to the safety of our children, staff and teachers. A threat that may easily be eliminated. Senator Phillips has proposed legislation known as S 9155. The bill if approved by the legislature and signed by the governor would allow schools to opt out of polling. This is an important step. A commonsense piece of legislation. We know our communities and the schools that our children attend better than any County Board of Elections. Our local elected school boards and the superintendents of our individual districts know our schools better than anyone else. In fact, School Safety Plans are designed by the superintendent based on the specific needs of their individual schools. Our superintendents and the school boards that serve us should determine if an election may be safely conducted within our schools not an unelected county official. Senator Phillips bill if passed would do just that. The legislation would give our school districts the legal right to tell the Board of Elections

not in our schools. ~~Schools do not have the resources necessary to make our schools safe during an election.~~ Schools cannot enforce a school safety plan and conduct an election. School safety plans and the election process are mutually exclusive. Allow our schools to opt out.

As I conclude my remarks I ask all of you for your help. Executive Order 181 adds another layer of uncertainty, it makes no sense to allow a convicted predator entry into the schools to vote. Schools do not have the financial resources nor the man power to provide the necessary level of security. To our elected representatives please support Senator Phillips' legislation S-9155. To our state representatives Vote yes when given the opportunity. Make this bill a law. To all of you in the audience, my fellow citizens please call your representatives and urge them to support S-9155. Contact your state representatives tell them our children are important to us. Our communities take school safety seriously. Tell them our schools should be allowed to opt out of acting as polling locations for elections if they so choose. Finally, to the Nassau County Board of Elections we ask that you do not hold the November 6 election at NHPMHS. Tully Park held the Sept 13th

primary vote this year, Tully Park should also be the location of the November 6 general election. Common sense and the safety of our children should count for something.

No one should be allowed to compromise the safety of our school children because of a vote. The perceived inconvenience of moving polling out of schools should not trump a child's well-being or safety. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony. Thank you for listening to our concerns.