

Statement Before the Joint New York State Senate and Assembly
Standing Committees on Elections and Local Government
August 11, 2020
10:00 am

My name is Shari Rapowitz Woldenberg and I represent over 400 members of the Rochester section of the National Council of Jewish Women, a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates founded in 1893. We believe Democracy is strongest when every voice is counted, and today we are asking for additional funding for safe and secure absentee balloting and early voting. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on this important topic.

I would like to talk about my 78 year old mother, who will reside in an independent senior living home on November 3, 2020. We voted together on November 8, 2016, mother and daughter celebrating the women's right to vote in Monroe County, where Susan B. Anthony fought over 100 years ago. We treasured that honor and never questioned the safety and security of our vote.

November 3, 2020 brings a different America. My mother is in a high risk category for coronavirus and cannot vote in person. Her first choice is to mail an absentee ballot, but she is concerned about technical problems which occurred on Primary Day, June 23, 2020, in Monroe County and throughout New York State.

The Rochester section of the National Council of Jewish Women asked Governor Cuomo to issue an Executive Order expanding no-excuse mail-in voting and we stand in solidarity with all recommendations made today by the League of Women Voters. We would like to see uniform absentee voting procedures, ballot tracking, extended deadlines, extended staff to count votes, provided return postage or secure drop boxes such as those that exist in the state of Oregon, and more. My mother wants confidence that her vote will count.

However, in addition to issues surrounding absentee ballots in June, Monroe County also experienced the following:

1. Only around 1% of voters used in-person early voting thus many polling places had to accommodate more voters than expected.
2. Some voting sites had to be moved because schools were closed and nursing homes did not want the public inside.
3. Several districts shared the same polling place, and in some cases, the poll workers distributed one district's ballot to people in the other district causing confusion among voters who did not see the names of candidates they were planning to vote for.

Therefore we also support safe and secure early voting. We asked Monroe County to allocate a portion of Covid related funds for the following activities:

1. Increase the number of early voting sites.
2. Install voting machines in the 34 nursing homes in Monroe County during the early voting period so that residents can vote safely "at home". Members of the public would not be allowed to use those machines while they are in nursing homes, which could benefit between 5,000 and 5,500 nursing homes residents in the county.
3. Educate voters by publicizing details regarding voter registration, absentee voting and early voting in both English and Spanish through multiple outlets including: newspapers, radio, television, social media, printed materials and text messages.
4. Recruit, train and provide additional protective supplies for more poll workers to work at voting sites, including young adults.

With additional funding for expanded early voting in New York State along with expanded absentee balloting, my mother will have confidence in a fair, safe, secure and legitimate election. Thank you for your time.

Shari Rapowitz Woldenberg