

August 10, 2020

New York State Board of Elections
40 North Pearl Street, Suite 5
Albany, NY 12207-2729

New York City Board of Elections
32-42 Broadway, 7 Fl
New York, NY 10004

RE: Elected and Party Officials and Political Groups Urge NY to Improve it's Elections Processes

Dear Governor Andrew Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Carl Heastie, Mayor Bill de Blasio, Speaker Corey Johnson, New York State Board of Elections Co-Chairs Peter Kosinski and Douglas Kellner, New York State Board of Elections Commissioner Andrew Spano, and New York City Board of Elections Commissioners Jose Araujo, Miguelina Camilio, Michael Michel, Simon Shamoun, Robert Siano, Patricia Taylor, Tiffany Townsend, Frederic Umane, and John Zaccone,

We, the undersigned, are elected and party officials, political clubs, and other interested organizations, who are writing as leaders concerned with the dysfunction of New York City's and State's electoral processes. During our recent primary election on June 23rd, there was a lack of communication to New York voters on how to make sure their votes would be counted and how properly to fill out an absentee ballot, and there were major issues with counting ballots in a timely fashion. Recently, a Federal court held that numerous ballots had been unconstitutionally excluded. We cannot afford to look away from these problems. In order to sustain and increase New Yorkers' civic engagement, we must secure their trust in the city and state's ability to facilitate their constitutional right to vote.

The November 3rd general election is of paramount importance. We must get this right. Therefore, we are sharing the following recommendations which are based on feedback from constituencies, as well as ideas put forward by officials such as NYS Board of Elections Commissioner Doug Kellner and some of our elected representatives:

1 - The New York City (NYC BOE) and State Boards of Elections (NYS BOE) commissioners and senior staff must meet to learn from each other and to coordinate an effective strategy for November.

2 – NYC BOE and NYS BOE must coordinate with the United States Postal Service to ensure that ballots are postmarked. The BOEs must be confident that workers at each local post office branch understand the need to postmark absentee ballots. If this cannot be guaranteed, absentee ballot boxes must be placed at entrances in early and Election Day poll sites where voters can drop off such ballots, ensuring their timely submission with minimal interaction with poll site staff.

3 - Absentee ballots must be clear. During the primary, several issues confused thousands of voters:

a) Many voters did not know they needed to use the ballot envelope and put their ballots directly in the mailing envelope. The requirement to use both envelopes needs to be more explicit on the envelopes themselves.

b) Many voters did not know to seal their ballot envelope. The requirement to seal it should be explicit in the instructions and should be extremely prominent on the ballot envelope itself. Long term, BOEs must explore using a secrecy folder in lieu of a secrecy envelope to eliminate the need for an additional, interior envelope.

c) Many voters did not know they needed to sign the ballot envelope. The requirement to sign it should be explicit in the instructions and extremely prominent on the ballot envelope.

d) Many voters did not know whether they needed to fill out an information block on the ballot envelope. The ballot envelope, near that information block, should prominently state: "TO BE FILLED OUT BY BOARD OF ELECTIONS STAFF. LEAVE BLANK."

e) Translations of ballots must be reviewed. Certain Primary absentee ballot translations had errors which caused confusion. Each translation of the November ballot should receive a thorough review before printing.

4 - Polling places must be adequately staffed. Thousands of poll workers did not show up on Primary Day, leaving many polling places understaffed and wait times unacceptably long. BOEs must prepare for these staffing issues and ensure that they have sufficient poll workers, even assuming many will be no-shows as happened in June. We are encouraged by some counties' efforts to engage more poll site workers, but the mandate must be equal across county lines.

5 - Poll workers must be adequately trained on ballot distribution. During the primary, there were two ballot sheets, but many voters received only one. In many cases, voters

received a primary ballot for the wrong party. Such mistakes are unacceptable and cannot recur in November.

6 - Voting machines must be tested. Many voting machines have malfunctioned, leading to long lines. BOEs must make sure that each polling place tests their machines prior to the election to ensure they are operational.

7 - Counting must be more efficient. Counting did not begin until well into July, and certification was not completed until August.

a) Ballot counting must begin the day after the due date for absentee ballots to be received. Each county's BOE must have adequate staff to organize ballots and funding must be provided for locations large enough to maximize staff counts to ensure ballots are counted more quickly.

b) Ballot counting must proceed expeditiously. In certain counties, such as Brooklyn and Queens, counting moved rapidly and was completed in a reasonable amount of time from when it began. In other counties, such as Manhattan, that was not the case. Specifically, in Manhattan, certain procedures dramatically slowed counting speeds. For example, Manhattan insisted on photocopying each ballot in between opening it and counting it. In other boroughs, ballots were counted immediately after opening, allowing for quick counting, and for bulk copying afterwards.

8 - Ballot errors must be curable:

a) Ballot envelopes should include fields for contact information in case a defect is found in the ballot.

b) NYC BOE staff must contact, via email, text message, or phone call if available, and via standard mail if unavailable and if time permits, each individual whose ballot has been deemed invalid for any reason. Those individuals must be presented with a simple method of curing the defect in a timely fashion.

9 - Long-term reforms must be implemented. New York State elected officials must draft and sign legislation to create structural changes at NYC BOE and NYS BOE. The system must be modernized, and it must be conducive to running elections efficiently, in a way that maximizes participation. These reforms may require changes to the New York State Constitution, and such changes must be on the table. Reforms must be accompanied by adequate funding for local BOEs.

10 – NYC BOE and NYS BOE must listen to experts. We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, have varied experience and expertise in the issues discussed herein.

BOEs must seek out local groups' on-the-ground experience as well as election advocacy organizations' issue expertise in creating policies and procedures to ensure fair and efficient elections in November and beyond.

We all look forward to working together towards a better, more efficient and more straightforward elections process for New York. Thank you.

Signed,

Broadway Democrats
Chelsea Reform Democratic Club
Coalition for a District Alternative
Downtown Independent Democrats
Empire State Indivisible
Four Freedoms Democratic Club
Gramercy-Stuyvesant Independent Democrats
Grand Street Democrats
Independent Neighborhood Democrats
Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club
Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club of Queens
National Association of Social Workers - NYC PAC
New Downtown Democrats
New Reformers
New Visions Democratic Club
Queens County Committee For All
Queens United Independent Progressives
Samuel J. Tilden Democratic Club
Stonewall Democratic Club of NYC
True Blue NY
United Democratic Organization
Village Independent Democrats

Catalina Cruz, Assemblymember, AD39
Harvey Epstein, Assemblymember, AD74
Nathalia Fernandez, Assemblymember, AD80
Richard Gottfried, Assemblymember, AD75
Brad Lander, City Councilmember, CD39
Yuh-Line Niou, Assemblymember, AD65

Keith Powers, City Councilmember, CD4
Dan Quart, Assemblymember, AD73
Jessica Ramos, State Senator, SD13
Carlina Rivera, City Councilmember, CD3
Jo Anne Simon, Assemblymember, AD52

Curtis Arluck, District Leader, AD69 Part C
Lee Berman, District Leader, AD65 Part A
Melissa Bieri, District Leader, AD37 Part B
Zachariah Boyer, District Leader, AD36 Part B
Louise Dankberg, District Leader, AD74 Part C
Emilia Decaudin, District Leader and State Committeemember, AD37 Part A
Sylvia Di Pietro, District Leader, AD75 Part A
Deborah Dolan
Derek Evers, District Leader, AD37 Part B
Vittoria Fariello, District Leader, AD65 Part C
Jonathan Gardenhire, District Leader, AD65 Part B
Jennifer Hoppe, District Leader, AD66 Part A
Jeannine Keily, District Leader, AD66 Part B
Caroline Laskow, District Leader, AD65 Part A
Rachel Lavine, State Committeemember, AD66
Jesse Laymon, District Leader, AD37 Part A
Myrna LePree, District Leader, AD74 Part B
Jenny Low, District Leader, AD65 Part D, and State Committeemember, AD65
Mary Ann Maikish
Christopher Marte, State Committeemember, AD65
Shawna Morlock, District Leader, AD36 Part B
Mark Morrill, District Leader, AD27 Part B
Kim Moscaritolo, District Leader, AD76 Part B
Breeana Mulligan, District Leader, AD 36, Part A
Samy Nemir-Olivares, District Leader, AD53
Thomas H. Nooter, District Leader, AD74 Part B
Jesse Pierce, District Leader and State Committeemember, AD52
Carol Ann Rinzler
Virginia Ramos Rios, State Committeemember, AD28
Paula Diamond Roman, District Leader, AD69 Part C
Sandro Sherrod, District Leader, AD74 Part C
Justin Westbrook-Lowery, District Leader, AD87
Michelle Winfield, State Committeemember, AD74

Justin Yu, District Leader, AD65 Part D