



September 9, 2020

Governor Cuomo
Executive Chamber
Capitol Building
Albany, N.Y. 12234

Via Email

Re: As Part of Response to COVID-19 Emergency Please Provide \$50 Million in Additional Voting Support to the State Board of Elections

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Recent reports have underscored the pressing need for state funding for our November elections. Our organizations are acutely aware that New York has a series of brutal budget choices ahead, but funding the state's democracy and supporting the safety and security of its elections must be prioritized ahead of the most consequential election in recent history.

The New York State Board of Elections (NYSBOE) estimated last month that at least \$50 million will be needed in order for the state and local boards of election to adequately prepare for the eightfold increase in voter turnout anticipated in November. Over 1.8 million New Yorkers voted during the June primary; the NYSBOE projects as many as 8 million voters in November – and this is all happening when local boards of election are particularly starved for funds.

Congress correctly appropriated over \$20 million in CARES Act funding to New York's BOEs earlier this year, which was a lifeline to cash-strapped counties that saw a surge in unanticipated expenditures due to the pandemic. The NYSBOE reports almost all of the federal emergency funding has been spent and more money is needed to:

- **Protect the health and safety of poll workers and voters.** There were 248 early voting poll sites and 3,636 election day poll sites during the June primary. Counties will need to adhere to the CDC-recommended mass gathering safety protocols in order to minimize health risks. Counties will need to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks, hand sanitizer, and acrylic barriers and increase the cleaning of high-touch surface areas like voting privacy booths and poll site doors.
- **Appropriately staff and pay for the expanded absentee voting program.** Nearly 40% of New Yorkers voted absentee in June. This is extraordinary growth, and the state and local election boards face challenges dealing with this volume during COVID-19. Boards of election need larger facilities in which to count absentee votes in order to maintain social distancing as well as additional staff to process the ballots in a timely way. Already stressed by COVID-19, local boards, especially in smaller counties, need help paying postage and mailing costs for the enormous – and welcome – expansion of absentee voting.
- **Conduct voter outreach.** Counties must go beyond the basics to notify voters of all the upcoming dates and deadlines that are part of the November election. Because of the changes spurred by COVID-19, it is no longer enough to notify voters that an election is happening on November 3rd. Boards of election must inform voters about *all their voting options* including early voting, absentee or in person on Election Day. In particular, counties need to highlight the nine days of early voting so as to disperse voters during the in-person voting period and ease pressure on poll sites.

It is our hope that you work vigorously to get the State BOE \$50 million in additional COVID-19 emergency funds for distribution to local boards as soon as possible. New York's voters are a mere six weeks away from the start of in-person voting and counties have already begun to process absentee ballot requests.

Respectfully,

Betsy Gotbaum
Executive Director
Citizens Union

Susan Lerner
Executive Director
Common Cause New York

Laura Ladd Bierman
Executive Director
League of Women Voters New York State

Blair Horner
Executive Director
NYPIRG

John Kaehny
Executive Director
Reinvent Albany

Cc:
Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie
Senator Zellnor Myrie
Senator Liz Krueger
Assemblymember Charles Lavine
Assemblymember Helene Weinstein
Senate Minority Leader Robert Ort
Assembly Minority Leader William Barclay