



August 18, 2020

Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins
State Senate
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12247

Speaker Heastie
State Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Elections Cmte. Chair Myrie
State Senate
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12247

Election Law Cmte. Chair Lavine
State Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Local Government Cmte. Chair Gaughran
State Senate
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12247

Local Governments Cmte. Chair Thiele
State Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Re: Continuing oversight hearings on elections during a pandemic

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and Chairs Myrie, Lavine, Gaughran, and Thiele:

We write to thank you for holding last week's hearing on elections during a pandemic, and ask you to continue holding oversight hearings until November to establish benchmarks and ensure that the Board of Elections makes substantial progress in preparing for the general election. At a minimum, we advise at least one additional oversight hearing in late September or early October, which will serve as an interim reporting opportunity to the Chairs.

The August 11th hearing was productive in helping New Yorkers understand what went wrong during the June primaries and learn what can be done to prevent further turmoil in the general election. At a moment when too many leaders are attempting to sow distrust in the nation's voting systems, New York must serve as a model for elections, not a cautionary tale. New York state leaders must do everything possible to ensure that voters are informed of their options and can safely and easily exercise their constitutionally protected right to vote on Election Day and in the weeks before.

The turmoil experienced by some voters cannot be repeated in the general election – an election in which there will be many more voters participating. It is clear from your first hearing that the state needs to do much more to support elections – particularly ensuring New Yorkers of their absentee voting option. Moreover, we believe that a deep dive into the institutional workings of the state’s boards of elections system is long overdue. Hearings can help to build a record for needed reforms. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, shining the light of public scrutiny on New York’s too often inadequate elections administration can change behavior for the better.

We strongly urge you to hold more hearings in the months ahead so that New York is adequately prepared for what will be an election of historic importance.

Sincerely,

John Kaehny
Executive Director
Reinvent Albany

Betsy Gotbaum
Executive Director
Citizens Union

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

Blair Horner
Executive Director
NYPIRG