**Testimony of Reinvent Albany for Assembly Election Law Hearing
On Ranked Choice Voting in New York City**

July 19, 2021

Reinvent Albany advocates for transparent, accountable government in New York State. We strongly support making it easier for New Yorkers to vote and believe Ranked Choice Voting empowers voters. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for this hearing.

Reinvent Albany believes that the release of erroneous election results on June 29th was the failure of the New York City Board of Elections (NYC BOE), not Ranked Choice Voting (RCV).

The NYC BOE itself has taken responsibility for the oversight. After the mistake was found, the NYC BOE said in a statement, "Let us be clear: RCV was not the problem, rather a human error that could have been avoided."[1] The NYC BOE added that it "must regain the trust of New Yorkers."

NYC BOE Structure Inherently Dysfunctional
Unfortunately, despite often huge efforts by the professional staff, NYC BOE suffers from an inherently dysfunctional structure that puts political patronage before voters.[2] Commissioners and staff are often chosen on the basis of their relationships, rather than their expertise.[3] As a result, nearly every single election produces new headlines about how the NYC BOE bungled voting administration. Here are just a few recent examples:

- Prior to the 2020 general election, the Board used a no-bid contracting process to select a vendor to print absentee ballots, and nearly 100,000 Brooklyn voters received the wrong ballot as a result.[4]

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[1] https://web.enrboenyc.us/rcv/
[2] https://www.nytimes.com/1971/09/23/archives/rotten-boroughs-rotten-board.html
[3] https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doi/reports/pdf/2013/2013-12-30-BOE_Unit_Report.pdf
[4] https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/29/politics/brooklyn-absentee-ballot-printing-error/index.html

- In the 2020 primary election, the Board invalidated 21% of Brooklyn absentee ballots, with predominantly black districts seeing the highest rates of ballot disqualification.[5] [6]
- In 2018, long lines outside polling places forced voters to wait up to four hours to vote.[7]

We believe decades of disappointment have shown that the NYC BOE is inherently flawed and should be replaced by a non-partisan, professional agency akin to the Campaign Finance Board or a Mayoral agency.

Ranked Choice Voting Empowers Voters
Ranked Choice Voting, on the other hand, has been repeatedly proven to strengthen democracy, and New Yorkers are overwhelmingly satisfied with the new system. In a poll commissioned by Common Cause New York and Rank the Vote NYC, 77% of New Yorkers said they want to use RCV in future elections.[8] More than 90% of voters in all polled ethnicities found Ranked Choice Voting easy to use, and 72% ranked at least three candidates.

While the NYC BOE has repeatedly disenfranchised both voters and candidates of color, Ranked Choice Voting benefits voters and candidates of color. Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and Congressman Jamaal Bailey recently pointed to a May 2021 report by FairVote showing that victorious candidates of color tend to grow their support during RCV's tabulation rounds.[9] The study also found that voters of color typically rank more candidates than white voters.[10]

It is obvious that the June 29th mishap was the fault of the NYC BOE, not Ranked Choice Voting. We encourage the Assembly to join the State Senate in examining how to reform the NYC BOE so that it can effectively serve New Yorkers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Please contact Tom Speaker at tom [at] reinventalbany.org should you have any questions.

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[5] https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/one-five-mail-ballots-rejected-botched-nyc-primary-n1236143
[6] https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/newkings/pages/459/attachments/original/1606587176/BOE_explainer.pdf
[7] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/06/nyregion/nyc-voting-machines.html
[8] http://readme.readmedia.com/RANK-THE-VOTE-NYC-RELEASES-EDISON-RESEARCH-EXIT-POLL-ON-THE-ELECTION/17989282
[9] https://rankthevotenyc.org/in-new-york-city-ranked-choice-voting-puts-the-people-in-charge/
[10] https://www.fairvote.org/report_rcv_benefits_candidates_and_voters_of_color