

March 24, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader, New York State Senate
172 State Street, The Capitol, Room 330
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building 932
Albany, NY 12248

Re: Support for Election Funding in NYS Budget

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

The undersigned organizations commend the New York State Senate and Assembly for the inclusion of additional funding for local boards of elections and election reform measures in their one-house budgets. We urge leadership to maintain this commitment to democracy and election reform in the final budget.

We strongly support the Senate's inclusion of the following **budget line items for local and state boards of elections**:

- **\$15 million** to increase salaries and hire new employees (S4003B)
- **\$15 million** to purchase new voting equipment and make software/technology upgrades (S4004B)
- **\$2 million** to implement the NYS Elections Database and Institute (S4003B)

In addition, we support the Assembly's inclusion of **\$10 million in funding for the continued implementation of early voting and absentee voting programs by boards of elections (A3003B)**.

In the final budget, we urge you to include the Senate's \$30 million and Assembly's \$10 million in funding for local boards of elections. In addition, we hope the budget includes a total of \$5 million to fully implement the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (**\$2.4 million for the NYS Elections Database and Institute and \$2.6 million for preclearance by the Office of Attorney General**). Elections are often the last item on the list when it comes to county budgets and many county boards operate with limited resources to implement vital changes to the election law. New York State must play a continuing role in funding local election administration.

We also strongly support the Senate's inclusion of the following **election reform bills** in the Public Protection and General Government Article VII legislation:

- Establishing the New York Voting and Elections Database and Institute (S.657) (PART DD)
- Prohibiting contributions by foreign-influenced business entities (S.371) (PART EE)

- Exempting poll worker pay from state taxes and public benefit cutoff thresholds (S.613) (PART FF)
- Increasing the minimum pay for poll workers (S.136) (PART GG)
- Establishing mandatory staffing levels at local boards of elections (S.644) (PART HH)
- Requiring local election commissioners to be full-time employees (S.611) (PART II)
- Establishing a mandatory training curriculum for poll workers (S.587) (PART JJ)
- Establishing a mandatory training curriculum for local board of elections commissioners and employees (S.617) (PART KK)

We also strongly support the funding from both the Senate and Assembly of the **\$14.5 million in administrative funds and \$25 million in matching funds for the public campaign finance program**. We urge you to maintain this commitment in the final budget, which will enable the agency to hire staff and implement the technology necessary to put the program on a firm foundation for candidates who choose to participate. With the first cycle of the program already underway, this commitment will give prospective candidates — and voters who wish to engage as small donors — confidence in the program’s future.

Our organizations request that you considering including an additional **\$2.5 million for the state and local boards to conduct voter outreach, media campaigns, and civic education** to encourage participation in elections, inform the public of upcoming contests, key deadlines, and balloting options; and, to educate voters regarding the major recent changes to voting laws and the safeguards to ensure due process. This initiative will help improve parity of election administration and establish a baseline for voter access for all New York voters regardless of where they live.

We recognize and commend the Legislature for its leadership in improving New York election administration in recent years, from reducing barriers to voter registration, providing more convenient balloting options, adding due process to protect rights and ensure legitimate votes are counted, and enacting measures to ensure the integrity and accuracy of election results. Administrators now need the necessary resources to implement recent reforms, and to procure and maintain the equipment to administer modern elections.

As you draft the final version of the budget, we ask that you ensure that these critical priorities are funded and implemented.

Sincerely,

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

John Kaehny
Executive Director, Reinvent Albany

Betsy Gotbaum
Executive Director, Citizens Union

Susan Lerner
Executive Director, Common Cause/NY

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Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq.
Executive Director, Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College

Christina Harvey
Executive Director, Stand Up America

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Co-Founder and Voting Rights Counsel, Vote Early New York

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