League of Women Voters of New York State
Statement on Passage of State Budget

The League of Women Voters of New York State is pleased that the 2019-2020 state budget includes $10 million for early voting implementation funding for counties and $14.7 million for electronic poll-books. These funds will be critical to help early voting get off to a good start in New York State. In addition to the benefits of this funding, voting will be more accessible for New Yorkers with expanded primary voting hours in upstate from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., more time off for workers on election day, and enhanced ability to register to vote online through the state Board of Elections website. These reforms are hallmarks of progress in finally establishing a 21st century voting system for New York State.

On the other hand, this budget agreement did not bring needed comprehensive campaign finance reform. Instead, it delegates to a still-to-be-formed Public Financing Commission consideration of one aspect of campaign finance reform -- a small donor public matching system. We agree that it is important to get the details of any public matching system correct, but this is what our representatives are elected and paid to do, rather than delegate their responsibilities to an unaccountable commission. It is critical for the success of any public financing system that it include lower limits for non-participating candidates as well as participating candidates, and independent and effective enforcement. New Yorkers have been frustrated for many years by the deplorable condition of our state’s campaign finance system and the oversized influence of wealthy donors. Our elected legislators just received a $10,000 pay raise today upon the timely delivery of the new budget; they should begin to earn their increased pay by holding hearings on comprehensive campaign finance reform with the goal of delivering legislation during this session. Legislators can build upon the public financing bill that the State Assembly has repeatedly passed in recent years, lower the state’s sky-high contribution limits and finally put in place real enforcement of campaign finance laws.