**Funding for Voting**

**Funding for 2020 Elections**

In 2020, voters will have the opportunity to vote in two primaries and the general election. With the newly passed mandate for all elections to have a 9-day period of early voting, there will be a minimum of 30 days of voting during this election cycle. Last year, counties spent above and beyond the $25 million of funding allocated to them by the state for a single period of early voting. These counties are estimating that the total cost for early voting in 2020 could be well over $200 million.

The Governor included a $10 million re-appropriation in the Aid to Localities to cover the costs of early voting incurred in 2019. He has also included a re-appropriation of $15 million in Capital Projects to pay for election equipment purchased in 2019, and $16 million for the creation of an online voter registration portal. New York State counties will need funding for their three periods of early voting in 2020. We urge the legislature to consider adding funds for early voting in their FY 2020-2021 budget proposal.

In addition to tripling the number of days of voting, county boards of elections discovered several unforeseen costs related to early voting in the prior year. These costs included issues with location, electrical power, the need for additional equipment and staff, and the expected increase in voter turnout in 2020. Below are summaries of each of these cost barriers that have the potential to drive up the cost of early voting in 2020.

**Location**

Although counties tried to use public sites to save costs, a large majority of counties have been told by these public facilities that they do not wish to serve as poll sites in 2020. Some sites raised concerns around security issues, while other sites said they felt that having their space taken up by voting equipment, staff, and voters for 9 days was far too onerous. County Commissioners have already asked for guidance from the State Board for procuring site locations in 2020.

The legislature has also proposed several reforms to the selection of site locations that may force some counties to open more locations that they had in 2019. This will again increase costs not only for site rental and overhead, but also for staff and additional equipment.

**Electrical Power**

In addition to location issues, electrical power capabilities were an issue for many counties. Counties who were able to purchase new voting equipment found that many public sites did not have adequate power capabilities. In several counties, commissioners had to bring in generators to power equipment. Renting these generators and paying for gasoline each day of early voting was a huge cost for counties. The New York City Board of Elections reported paying as much as $147,000 for the use of generators and fuel at poll sites. Changing poll site locations to larger, private spaces may address the need for additional power sources, but this could cause an additional overhead cost.

**Equipment**

In 2019 only 52 of New York’s 62 counties purchased electronic poll books. On Election Day, 34 of these
counties continued to use electronic poll books while the remaining 27 reverted back to using paper poll books, with one county using a hybrid of both. These counties used several different tactics to update their poll books on the Sunday and Monday before Election Day to ensure voters who had already voted early would not be on the voter rolls. Some printed them at their offices, others had the books printed before the election and had staff update them using a stamp. Regardless of the method, reverting to paper poll books was difficult and costly for counties. Many of these counties have said they hope to have electronic poll books for their entire county in 2020. The 10 counties who did not purchase electronic poll books have also said they are interested in purchasing the equipment.

**Staff**

With 30 days of voting in 2020, the cost of staff will undoubtedly increase for all counties in New York. Counties will be better able to make predictions about the need for staff during the 2020 early voting periods and adjust for time frames when they expect lower turnout but counties will still have to consider the three periods of voting when hiring their poll workers.

**2020 Voter Turnout**

With a major election taking place in November, the number of voters voting early is expected to far exceed the totals seen in 2019. In 2019, roughly 9% of New York’s 3 million voters voted early. In 2020, the Board of Elections is expecting a record turnout of 8 million voters. If only 10% of these voters choose to vote early, close to one million voters will turn out to one of New York’s 248 early voting poll sites. Having such an incredible turnout would be a major achievement for New York State which typically sees low voter engagement, but without proper funding, counties will be ill prepared to accommodate this upsurge in voters.

**Funding for the State Board of Elections**

The New York State Legislature should be proud of the progressive slate of voting reforms that has been passed over the last year. In time, these new operational and procedural changes will increase voter turnout and overall voter satisfaction. However, the agency charged with implementing these policies, the State Board of Elections (BOE), has seen repeated cuts to its already constrained budget and has little to no funding to execute these policy changes.

Online voter registration, automatic registration transfer, and pre-registration of 16 and 17-year olds all carry some implementation cost. In December it was reported that these costs had forced the BOE to divert funding dedicated for cyber security to cover the cost of their everyday operations. The Governor has sought to address this deficit by proposing $16 million for the creation of an online voter registration portal. Although a thoughtful investment, there are many other new programs that will need increased funding.

The Board of Elections has historically been an underfunded and understaffed agency and we cannot expect this body to continue to operate on a shoestring budget with constant funding cuts while we simultaneously increase their responsibilities and operational demands. If the legislature does continue to pass voting reforms such as automatic voter registration and same day voter registration, these will need another investment in order to be implemented.

The State Board of Elections and county boards of elections need a serious funding commitment to realize the goals of the legislative leaders and Governor. We urge the legislature to consider the importance of voting when drafting their budget revisions, and to ensure that their progressive elections reforms are not unfunded mandates.