April 24, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Over the last month you have made several significant decisions with regard to voting during the continuing coronavirus outbreak. We applaud your prudent choices to postpone the April primary and expand absentee voting to all New York State voters. However, although these are important policy decisions, they cannot be accomplished without a substantial investment in the infrastructure and capacity of our State Board of Elections.

New York State is eligible to receive $20 million in federal elections assistance through the CARES Act stimulus package. This critical funding can be used by our boards of elections to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus for the 2020 election cycle. New York State could use these funds to purchase cleaning supplies, protective masks for staff and poll workers, resources to meet the increased demand for absentee ballots, and temporary staff to process the increased absentee ballot demand.

In order to qualify for funding, New York State must amend its budget to acknowledge the receipt of these funds and commit to a 20% match to be paid over two years. We realize that a 20% match is extremely onerous at this time and are actively working to urge Congress to award New York this funding with no strings attached. In the meantime, we believe that the 20% match could be accomplished through an in-kind match from County Boards of Elections spending. County Boards of Elections will need to make these additional purchases regardless of the CARES funding and should qualify as an in-kind match for the grant; but without appropriate statutory language in the state budget, the State Board of Elections will be unable to receive and spend these funds.

Now more than ever, our Boards of Elections need monetary support to fulfill their mission and ensure that everyone has the right to participate in our elections fairly and safely. The $20 million in CARES Act funding dedicated to New York State will ensure the health and safety of New York voters and election administrators. We urge you to amend the state budget and include the necessary technical language to allow the State Board of Elections to administer CARES Act funding.

Sincerely,

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