



New York City Campaign Finance Board

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Testimony of Amy Loprest Executive Director, New York City Campaign Finance Board

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Good afternoon, Chairs Kallos and Gentile and members of the Governmental Operations and Oversight and Investigations Committees. My name is Amy Loprest, and I am Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB). Thank you for the opportunity to testify here. Elections provide opportunities for New Yorkers to express their collective will on the direction of our city, state, and nation. It is important that each New Yorker feels he or she can participate easily and be heard clearly, so we thank you for this hearing.

The Department of Investigation (DOI) issued two reports in 2013 that took a close look at the New York City Board of Elections.¹ Together, these reports raise serious and troubling concerns. Many of us who care about democracy in New York City are familiar with the troubles we've had with our elections. We have heard many of these stories from the public, or we've witnessed them ourselves over the years. The DOI's work helps make them concrete, and brings them into the spotlight for public discussions like today's hearing. This is a valuable service to voters and to anyone who cares about the democratic process in New York City.

The crucial next step is to identify and implement concrete solutions. Making better use of existing tools and adopting widely available technologies to modernize our election system will resolve many of them. We need to work together now to build a reliable and

¹ New York City Department of Investigation. "Report on the Board of Elections' Staffing Levels and Costs for the November 8, 2011 "Off-Year" General Election." Rose Gill Hearn, Commissioner, April, 2013. http://www.nyc.gov/html/doi/downloads/pdf/2013/apr13/pr12boerpt_40113.pdf; New York City Department of Investigation. "Report on the New York city Board of elections' Employment Practices, Operations, and Election Administration." Rose Gill Hearn, Commissioner. December, 2013. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doi/downloads/pdf/2013/dec%2013/BOE%20Unit%20Report12-30-2013.pdf>

accessible voting system that offers New Yorkers many of the conveniences they are accustomed to in their everyday lives.

One area where progress can and should be made is improving the accuracy of the voter rolls. The CFB has some insight into the serious challenges of this task. We work with the same voter rolls to mail our print Voter Guide to millions of households before each citywide municipal election. Other parts of our work involve seeking matches between disparate sources of data. Over the several past months, Executive Director Mike Ryan has briefed CFB staff on the BOE's efforts to improve the accuracy of the voter list. While the BOE should take every precaution to avoid mistakenly removing eligible voters from the rolls, the BOE should utilize existing databases to improve its list of registered voters. Doing so can help to shorten the lines at polling places on Election Day and make our elections more secure.

In the past 20 years, new technologies have revolutionized almost every aspect of the way New Yorkers navigate daily life. Unfortunately, the revolution has failed to improve the way that New Yorkers vote.

To provide New Yorkers with a better voting experience, we should better incorporate modern technology into the administration of poll sites as well. This was a key recommendation of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, which released its report last month.² Using tablets instead of paper poll books to check in voters would alleviate long lines, help quickly resolve questions about voters' registration status, and give voters more confidence in the electoral process.

Taking real steps to expand the poll worker pool would help address other issues raised in the DOI's December 2013 report. Legislation proposed in the last session of City Council would give city workers an incentive to serve on Election Day; a proposal like this is a concrete step this Council can take to create a broad and able pool of potential poll workers and translators.

We also urge lawmakers and election administrators to take concrete steps to improve poll worker training. The Presidential Commission's report calls on states to adopt poll worker training standards, and highlights jurisdictions that have implemented successful online training programs.³ We believe that both of these steps would address concerns highlighted in the DOI report.

² The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration. January, 2014. pp. 44-5 <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2014/01/Amer-Voting-Exper-final-draft-01-09-14-508.pdf>

³ The American Voting Experience, p. 49 <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2014/01/Amer-Voting-Exper-final-draft-01-09-14-508.pdf>

Our response must include a renewed effort to push our state legislators to make the changes in state Election Law that will ensure New York City has the voting system it deserves. CFB and our NYC Votes campaign will continue to make the case for these simple, common-sense proposals to bring election law into the 21st century.

- We should adopt early voting. Among other benefits, early voting would give voters time to resolve issues that arise at the polls, and practically eliminate the frustration of casting provisional ballots. Expanding opportunities to vote before Election Day was another key recommendation of the Presidential Commission.⁴
- We should have better-designed ballots. As noted in the DOI report, many voters had difficulty reading the small font of the 2013 ballot and others were not aware of the ballot proposals on the back of the ballot. The BOE is making important strides in this direction; adopting Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh’s Voter Friendly Ballot Act would allow them to accomplish even more.
- We should modernize voter registration. New York should become the 20th state to adopt universally accessible online voter registration. This would absolutely improve the accuracy of our voter rolls, and make it easier for voters who change their address to stay connected.

Finally, we believe that New York should adopt a non-partisan, independent model for its statewide election administration.⁵ This model is a proven way to avoid the gridlock that can be a result of the current bipartisan structure. We believe the CFB’s strong tradition of non-partisan, independent administration has enabled a robust campaign finance program that is effective, fair, and accountable to the public.

Together, we believe that these recommendations can put New York City on the path to providing a reliable, efficient voting process that New Yorkers can approach with confidence.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to discuss these important issues today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

⁴ The American Voting Experience, p. 56 <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2014/01/Amer-Voting-Exper-final-draft-01-09-14-508.pdf>

⁵ New York City Campaign Finance Board. “Voter Assistance 2012-2013 Annual Report.” April 2013. http://www.nycfb.info/PDF/var/2012-2013_VoterAssistanceAnnualReport.pdf