



## **New York City Campaign Finance Board**

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

#### **City Council Committee on Governmental Operations October 23, 2014**

Good afternoon, Chair Kallos and members of the committee. My name is Amy Loprest, Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB). I am joined today by one of our Board members, Art Chang. Art serves as chair of the CFB's Voter Assistance Advisory Committee. I am also joined by two members of the CFB's staff: Eric Friedman, Assistant Executive Director of Public Affairs, and Onida Coward Mayers, Director of Voter Assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. With an important election less than two weeks away, there should be renewed focus on improving New York's low voter participation rates. New Yorkers who demand better performance from their government can start with their own behavior. The starting point is voting. By simply casting a ballot, citizens can ensure government is accountable to their needs.

Government needs to do its part as well. Healthy democratic governments encourage civic participation by enabling the broadest possible access to the electoral process. While the voter registration deadline has passed for this year's general election on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the effort to involve more New Yorkers in our democracy will continue. For that reason, I am pleased the Council is holding this hearing and considering the two bills we are discussing today.

Increasing voter registration is a core mission for the CFB. Through the work of our Voter Assistance Advisory Committee (VAAC) and our NYC Votes campaign, we reach

thousands of New Yorkers at events around New York City each year to help them register to vote.

A central element of this work is helping our partners, both public and private organizations, build their own programs to educate and engage their constituents in the electoral process. Our popular Train the Trainer sessions provide these organizations with the tools to build a voter engagement program that is consistent with their own culture. These efforts have been very successful; in collaboration with more than 100 community and corporate partners, we collected more than 15,000 voter registration forms in 2013.

The City Charter requires the CFB to coordinate the activities of the 18 city agencies and 59 community boards that are required to help register voters under Local Law No. 29 of 2000. We have taken an active role in helping these agencies meet the goals of the law.

Our Voter Assistance staff works directly with each agency to develop and implement a voter action plan. Earlier this year, we held training sessions at our offices attended by representatives from 14 of the 18 covered city agencies and 13 of the community boards. We train agency staff to conduct on-site voter registration drives. We provide graphics spotlighting upcoming elections and deadlines for agencies to post on their websites, on social media, and in emails to their clients.

These trainings and the VAAC's regular public meetings provide a forum for these agencies to discuss their voter assistance efforts and compare notes on best practices. Our next VAAC meeting will be held on Tuesday evening at the CFB's offices at 100 Church Street. I invite all of you and everyone watching this hearing to attend.

Clearly, there are challenges in implementing the law, and there are areas where agency compliance can improve. We have seen a renewed push from this administration to make those improvements. In the course of our work, we have also seen a deep commitment among City agency staff to the broader goals of increasing voter registration and participation. Programs developed by our agency partners have made important

contributions to increasing voter participation in New York City. We should encourage these efforts, and offer City agencies some flexibility to meet their pro-voter mandate in ways that mesh with their own mission and culture.

Many of the agencies we work with go above and beyond the law's requirements. I would like to highlight a few examples.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has long been an active participant in our youth engagement initiatives. DYCD hosted youth voting workshops conducted by CFB staff at 16 of its Summer Youth Employment Program sites, and invited the young poets from the NYC Votes Youth Poet Laureate program to perform. DYCD has also been a big participant in National Voter Registration Day. In recognition of these efforts, the CFB awarded DYCD with our first annual NYC Votes Award for Excellence in Public Outreach last year.

The Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) has aired voting-themed public service announcements in taxicabs throughout the years. They have also conducted NYC Votes Election Day surveys on Taxi TV in yellow and green borough cabs, with more than 16,000 participants from 2012 to the present.

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) invited NYC Votes to register and talk to teenagers in its Housing Works who are approaching voter eligibility. ACS is also a regular participant in National Voter Registration Day, holding a registration drive at its office on William Street.

In addition, we've worked with city agencies which are not covered by Local Law 29, but participate in our programs voluntarily. One example is the Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), which routinely partners with us to hold voter registration drives in its hospitals and other facilities throughout the City. In 2013, HHC aired our Video Voter Guide in some facilities for two weeks leading up to the Primary and General elections. HHC has registered over 2,000 citizens since first partnering with us in 2012.

Other agencies have been fantastic voluntary partners, including the Department of Aging, Human Resources Administration, and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). These agencies are helping create a voting culture that fits with their own missions, and their efforts are to be commended.

Intro 493 would significantly expand the scope of the agency-based voter registration mandate to cover new agencies. The bill covers some of the voluntary partners I've mentioned, and we suggest you consider expanding the bill, to the extent the Council is able, to include other willing partners like HHC and NYCHA. We should encourage all of these agencies to go further and provide more New Yorkers with the opportunity to register to vote.

As I mentioned, agencies face some real challenges implementing Local Law 29. One concern we hear consistently is how best to provide voter registration forms to their clients. Incorporating the voter registration form into their own forms, as the Charter requires, can be cumbersome.

We are working with the new administration on ways to help agencies more readily provide the voter registration form to clients and make those efforts more effective. We are developing webinars and video resources to extend the reach of our training sessions to agency staff who may not be able to attend in person. We are working to develop annotated voter registration forms to guide agency staff and their clients on how to successfully complete the forms, and we are creating brochures to help elevate the profile of this important mission among front-line agency staff.

These programs should help agency staff highlight voter registration opportunities for their clients, which should make those clients more likely to register and vote.

As more and more New Yorkers interact with their government online, establishing true universal online voter registration would absolutely enhance agencies' efforts to meet

goals of the pro-voter law. Currently, access to online voter registration is available only to customers of the state Department of Motor Vehicles. The chair of this committee has submitted a bill to establish an online voter registration portal for New York City. Just think: a one-stop site where New Yorkers can transact all of the business of democracy would be a game changer. Electronic registration would also enable more thorough, real-time tracking of the agencies' efforts to help New Yorkers register.

As a simple step in this direction, we have asked the City Board of Elections to make available electronic pdfs of the form that include the tracking code for City agencies. Providing an electronic voter registration form these agencies can make available on their websites would help the agencies better serve their clients.

We support Intro 356, which will allow better tracking of the agencies' voter registration efforts. Agency-specific codes would allow agencies to evaluate which of their programs work best, and allow others to hold the agencies accountable when they fall short. Better tracking will help the CFB recommend specific ways our partners can improve their voter registration efforts. Clear, trackable data about agencies' voter registration efforts will also make it possible for the agencies and their staff to see that their work in this area is making a difference.

We would suggest that other agencies not covered by the Charter mandate may benefit from agency-specific tracking codes. The Department of Education (DOE), for instance, has a separate mandate to provide voter registration forms for students as they graduate from high school, but we cannot track the success of these efforts. The CFB is also mandated to assist in voter registration; a unique tracking code would allow us to more precisely quantify the impact of our own extensive voter registration programs.

I'd like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to hearing from the agency representatives here today about their experience with Local Law 29. Of course, I welcome any questions you may have.