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**NEW YORK CITY CAMPAIGN FINANCE BOARD VAAC PUBLIC HEARING  
ON 2013 ELECTION, HOW TO STRENGTHEN NYC ELECTIONS  
COUNCIL MEMBER GALE A. BREWER, 6<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, MANHATTAN  
DECEMBER 16, 2013**

Good afternoon, my name is Gale A. Brewer, and I represent the upper West Side and northern Clinton in the New York City Council. I am also the Chair of the City Council Committee on Governmental Operations, with oversight over the NYC Board of Elections (BOE) and the NYC Campaign Finance Board (CFB), amongst other agencies.

In my Committee in the New York City Council, we have held several oversight hearings regarding the CFB and the BOE since the 2010 Primary Election. I will focus my remarks on some problems I have repeatedly seen with Election Day operations, and some potential legislative remedies. Although the staff at the Board of Elections are hard-working, dedicated public servants, virtually every election since 2010 has had similar difficulties, including some late poll site openings, malfunctioning equipment, poorly-trained poll workers, poll site accessibility issues, long lines for voters at certain poll sites, and problems with affidavit ballots. It is of the utmost importance that New Yorkers are able to exercise their right to vote in the simplest, most streamlined manner possible. As I am sure you know, too many New Yorkers continue to face unacceptable obstacles in attempting to cast their vote. I will now address several of the issues which exist:

The first part of the voting process that requires overhaul is that of voter registration. New York's system is onerous for the voter due to the unnecessary length of time before an election when a voter must register, update their address, or change their party enrollment. Further, the current

process requires local Boards of Election to transcribe information off of handwritten paper registration forms into their computer systems. This is an error-prone and time-intensive process that contributes to faulty voter books and slows down lines at the poll site. I would urge the State Legislature to pass the Voter Empowerment Act sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris and Assemblymember Brian Kavanaugh (S1974/A1712) which would significantly enhance the registration process. I would like to applaud Governor Cuomo and the NYS DMV for their efforts to launch the MyDMV system which allows voters with a valid NYS ID to update their voter registration information online. This is a step in the right direction, but I believe a more complete overhaul would best serve the voters of our State and our City.

The second area that needs improvement is New York State's lack of early voting or no-excuse absentee voting options. My staff spoke with election administrators across the country who all praised the positive impact early voting had on their Elections. Many expressed disbelief that a State as progressive as New York lagged so far behind in their Election Administration. One administrator who is widely-praised for turning around her County's operations told us to quote her that "Early Voting is life changing!" I believe the State Legislature must act to make early voting a reality in New York, and Speaker Silver's bill, A689A, should be adopted.

Another area that needs improvement is the design of our ballots. Every Election I receive countless complaints from voters about the miniscule font size and confusing directions on their ballot. Unfortunately, as with most election issues, comprehensive change for ballot design requires State action. To that end, I hope that Assemblymember Kavanaugh's Voter Friendly Ballot Act (A204A) will be passed by the State Legislature soon to give voters a ballot they can actually read and comprehend. We passed a Resolution in support of this important bill in the City Council, and it would go a long way toward improving the voting process, especially for seniors and those with vision challenges.

Another issue which must be addressed is the lack of a consolidated Primary Election schedule. New York State should consolidate the State and Federal Primary Election to June, as would be required under Speaker Silver's legislation A8198. Holding a single primary election would save the state and local governments approximately \$50 million, and would likely improve voter turnout.

I also want to mention another topic that we have been debating in my Committee in the City Council, Instant Runoff Voting, or IRV. A comprehensive IRV system in New York City would save us up to \$20 million per citywide election cycle by eliminating the need to hold separate runoff elections for Mayor, Comptroller, and Public Advocate. Assemblymember Kavanagh has introduced a bill, A7013, that would change state law to allow for IRV, and I am a co-sponsor of a City Council Resolution in support of that bill. We are also considering legislation in the City Council to implement IRV at the local level. Although I believe that the best solution is a comprehensive IRV system in New York, I have also introduced a bill, Intro 1108-2013, which would establish IRV only for military and absentee voters.

At the very least, I believe this change should be made so that our soldiers and citizens living overseas have the chance to participate in the electoral process. Under current law, with the short time window between the Primary and Runoff elections, many military and overseas voters do not receive their ballots in time to vote in the Runoff election. Thanks to some good research compiled by Citizens Union, we have clear statistics demonstrating the drop-off in voter turnout for military and absentee voters in runoff elections. The bottom line is the short time period between the primary and runoff elections results in a decrease in absentee and military voter turnout of 14.04 percent and results in a 3.65 percent increase in late ballots that do not count. It is also important to recognize that these numbers are only for that small percentage of military and overseas citizens who actually take the time to register to vote absentee. Any IRV bill that becomes law in New York City is subject to a referendum.

Finally, I would like to close by mentioning two recent legislative successes I had which were recently signed into Law by Mayor Bloomberg. The NYC CFB supported both of these bills, and their hard work was greatly appreciated. First, Local Law 114 of 2013, my Sample Ballots bill, codifies a requirement that the NYC BOE post sample ballots on their website, which allow voters to easily enter their address, and view who they will be voting for. I do want to thank the BOE, because, at my request, they took the initiative to launch this service on their website last year, and it has been a huge hit with the public and the good government community. Next, Local Law 116 of 2013, my text message contributions bill, will allow candidates running for office to accept campaign contributions via text message. There will be a cap of \$99 per

candidate per contributor for year for all text donations to further encourage small donations. I worked extensively with the CFB staff on this legislation, and they were tremendously helpful in guaranteeing its passage. The New York City Campaign Finance system is often lauded as one of the country's best examples of how to encourage small donors to be involved in political campaigns, instead of relying on large contributions. This Law will provide a new way for people, especially those not typically involved in the political process, to donate to elected officials. This bill is a smart way to merge technology and good governance, and will hopefully attract more small donors into the political process.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today, and I look forward to working with you to make voting easier and more accessible for all New Yorkers.