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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

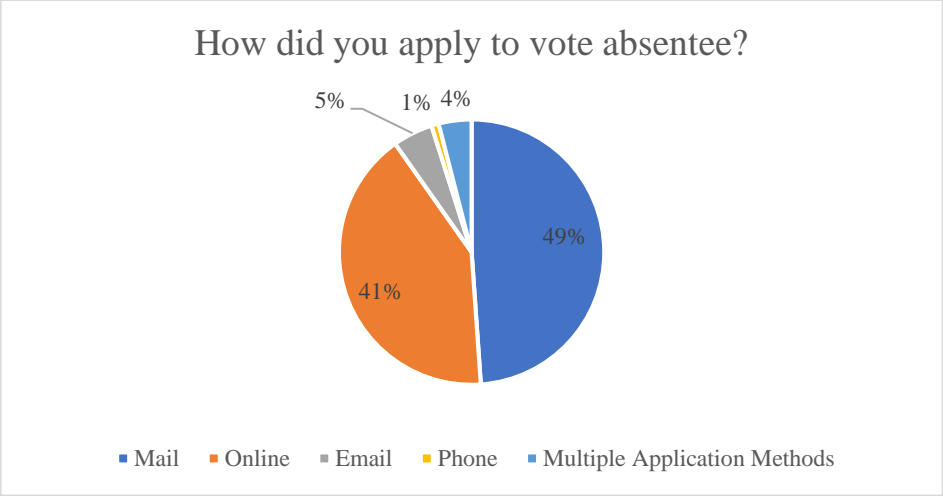
NEW YORK CITY VOTER ASSISTANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (VAAC) PUBLIC HEARING ON JUNE PRIMARY ELECTIONS July 1st, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding voters' experiences casting their ballot during the COVID-19 state of emergency. Over the last several months, Governor Cuomo instructed the State Board of Elections to make significant alterations to New York's voting procedures. In addition to postponing and consolidating the presidential primary, the Governor expanded options to request and reason for requesting an absentee ballot. County boards of elections were mandated to inform voters of these changes and ensure that all eligible active and inactive voters received an absentee ballot request form for the June primary.

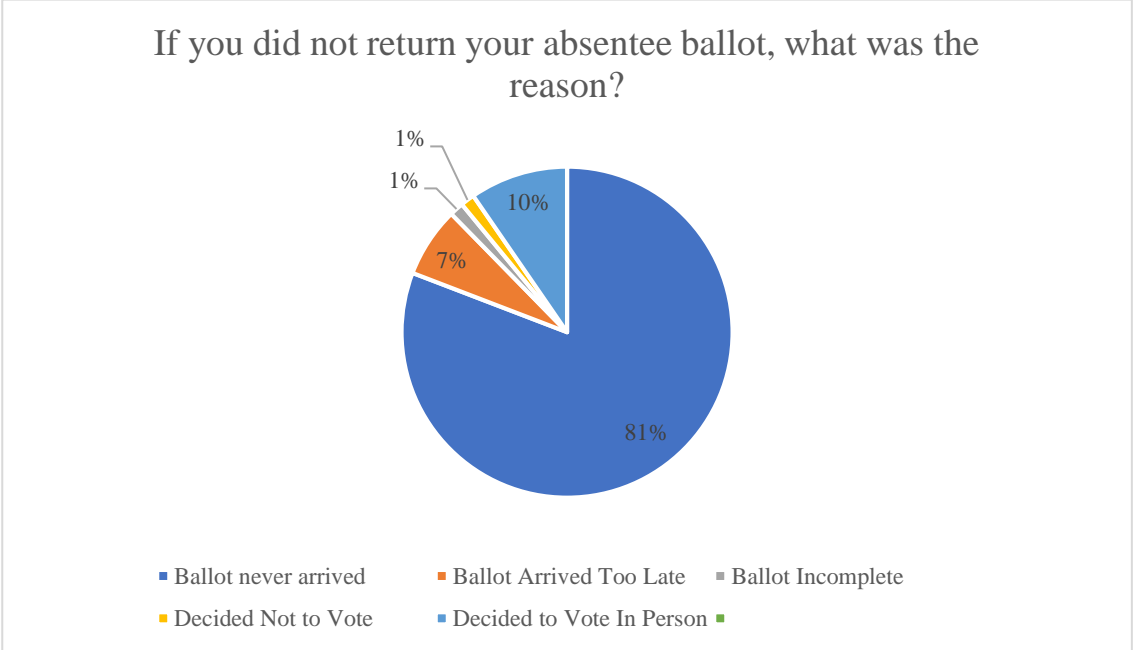
Leading up to the June primary, the League worked to educate voters on their options to vote during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. We used our website and social media pages to create a FAQ on voting via absentee in which we translated into Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Bengali. We created a database of information about county boards of elections which listed contact information for each board of elections, altered hours of operation, and options to request an absentee ballot in each county with specific links, emails addresses, and phone numbers to apply. The League also created short videos showing voters how to submit their absentee request form and what to expect after their form was submitted.

In addition to our educational efforts, the League worked with our voting rights partners to conduct a survey of voters who requested to vote via absentee. Of the 1,575 New York State voters who responded to our survey, 229 voters resided in the five boroughs of New York City.

Voters were asked about their experience voting absentee, how they applied to vote absentee, where they heard about the policy changes, how long they waited to receive their ballot, and about any problems they encountered when trying to submit their ballot. Although most voters easily found information about voting absentee from the New York City Board of Elections, through their family and friends, and social media, more than 29% of voters surveyed never received their absentee ballot even though they had requested it ahead of the deadline.

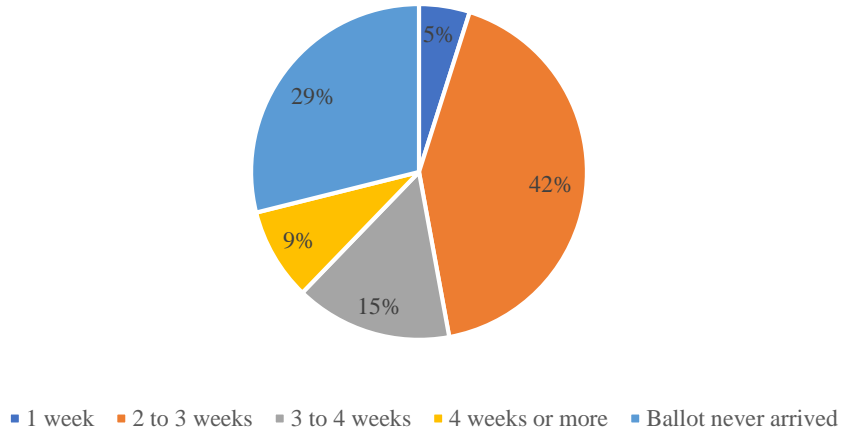


Voters who did not receive their ballot were not negligent in submitting their absentee requests. Voters in New York City applied to vote absentee in multiple ways. Nearly 50% applied via mail, 41% used the NYCBOE’s online portal, and 4% applied with multiple methods to ensure their ballot request was received. Of the New York City voters surveyed, 6 voters followed up with the NYCBOE to ensure their application was received. Only one of these voters did not receive a response.



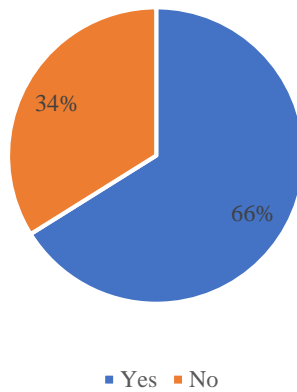
Of the voters who requested to vote absentee but did not submit an absentee ballot, 81% said it was because their ballot never arrived. 7% of voters did get their ballot but with insufficient time to mail the ballot back the the NYCBOE. 10% of those voters opted to vote in person, and 2% either decided not to vote or received an incomplete ballot.

How long did it take to receive your ballot?



On average, New York City voters waited between 2 to 3 weeks to receive their ballot in the mail. Alarmingly, 9% of voters waited 4 weeks or more for their ballot and nearly 30% never received their absentee ballot.

Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear?



Voters who did receive their ballot mostly found the directions to complete and submit their ballot clear, but 34% did feel that the directions were unclear. 15 voters left additional comments complaining that the instructions and envelope design were confusing and that there should have been better instructions on where to sign and how to fill out the ballot.

Overall, voters surveyed who did receive their ballots in time to vote for the primary felt the process was easy. These voters commented that they hoped the new absentee rules would be extended into November. Voters who did not get their ballot in time, or at all, had many negative comments about the absentee voting process. Voters also felt unsure whether their ballot would be accepted and counted, nearly 10% of voters surveyed said they were concerned about the status of their vote.

127 New York City voters left specific comments about their experience and concerns voting absentee in New York City. Notable survey comments are as follows:

- I requested my ballot be sent out of state as I am absent from county due to COVID. I requested it the Friday before the Tuesday deadline to the CBOE email designated for such. 6/26 it still hasn't gotten here. I doubt anyone will ever even see my request. (Brooklyn)
- Lots of confusion about how to use ballot, printing very small. Need a Largely printed postmark due date. This election is too important! (Brooklyn)
- Send receipts by email once received. (Brooklyn)
- Challenges to signature match can void the ballot and I would not be notified. (Brooklyn)
- I wish that voting information was sent via email. As someone who has moved a lot and is often away from home, I frequently miss info sent to my home. (Brooklyn)
- Just send every registered voter a ballot automatically. Requiring two separate steps made the process harder and took more time. (Manhattan)
- Send voter a receipt of ballot and processing (Bronx)
- Worked well for me, but friends are still waiting for their ballots. (Manhattan)
- It would be good to know that my ballot was received and that it was deemed valid without any of the mistakes that could render it invalid. (Manhattan)
- Make instructions for all elements of the ballot clear. Boxes on the form and on the envelope had no indication of whether they were meant to be filled in by voter or election officials. (Manhattan)
- I was nervous about not receiving the ballot in time. I mailed the application the same day I got it, which was later than people in Nassau got it, and I just received the ballot yesterday, June 19th, four days before the deadline. (Bronx)
- It's a leap of faith to put the ballot in the mailbox and assume it will be received and counted, but it's worth the uncertainty. (Manhattan)
- Make it easier to get a replacement ballot. I could have gone to pick one up for my husband as I'm not as concerned about covid and am more mobile. It was too late to wait for another ballot to arrive in the mail. (Brooklyn)
- My ballot arrived 6/19. My husband's nearly ten days ago. Why the difference when we submitted our requests at the same time? Hence my fear that my ballot may be lost. Would like to vote digitally, or by phone. (Queens)
- Serial number on outside envelope that could be used to see if ballot arrived on online lookup app. (Manhattan)
- Status reporting/Traceability - to look up whether your ballot has been received. (Brooklyn)

Looking ahead, the League hopes that the absentee voting expansions will be extended to apply to the November elections and that the NYSBOE will receive additional support to fulfil absentee requests.