

Voting Reform

Nothing should keep New Yorkers from exercising their right to vote. Everyone deserves a say in our government and our democracy – no matter where we live, what language we speak, or how much money we have. Voting is the right we exercise to protect all other rights.

Yet New York makes voting hard. Residents face red-tape and arbitrary deadlines just to register. If New Yorkers can take time away from work and family to vote, they may stand in long lines at the polls. They may find their names missing from paper poll books, causing them to cast affidavit ballots that might not get counted. Facing these challenges, New York has dismal voter registration and turnout.

That's why Governor Cuomo and the leadership in Albany should pass and implement the following four reforms in 2018:



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1. EARLY VOTING & NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE BALLOTING

One of the top reasons people report not voting is because they're too busy. Work and family obligations, health and transportation issues, and other unexpected obstacles can make it too difficult to cast a ballot in-person on one day. Amending the State Constitution to permit no-excuse absentee balloting could help make voting easier by allowing anyone to vote by mail. But for now, the legislature can and should allow a substantial period of in-person early voting to help make sure that all voters can find a convenient time to cast a ballot.

2. ELECTRONIC POLL BOOKS

At many polling locations around the state, a poll worker looks you up in a large paper poll book so you can stand in another line where another poll worker looks you up in another paper book. As large as those poll books are, they may be missing significant numbers of "inactive" voters, who are registered but haven't voted recently. Electronic poll books would save printing costs and shorten lines by speeding up the processing of voters. More importantly, electronic poll books will make sure that more voters get to cast a real ballot that gets counted and not a provisional one that might not. Electronic poll books can also facilitate implementation of early voting by allowing poll books to be updated regularly and easily.

3. AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION

In November 2016, New York ranked 47th among the 50 states and DC in voter registration rate (59 percent) according to data released by the Census Bureau. The burden is on voters to make sure that they're registered. AVR flips that burden by registering any eligible citizen who comes in contact with a state agency, unless the citizen chooses to opt-out. There are few better ways than automatic voter registration to make significant improvements to New York's dismal registration rate.

4. SHORTER REGISTRATION DEADLINES

New York's deadline to register 25 days before an election was passed before most modern computing and Internet technology. There's no reason the deadline shouldn't be reduced to 10 days before an election – the minimum required by the State Constitution. Election Day Registration would require an amendment to the New York State Constitution, but we can begin that process now. In fact, in the modern era, there's no reason not to pass a constitutional amendment this year to pave the way for same-day registration in New York by 2020. Fifteen states and DC allow voters to register and cast a ballot on the same day.

Expanding ballot access is a nonpartisan issue that enhances confidence in the democratic process, strengthens the legitimacy of elected officials and helps ensure that New Yorkers can hold their government accountable.

New York should be leading, not lagging when it comes to our voting process. New York is a state of innovators but we need to catch up to other states and bring our 19th century election system up to date.

- 37 states and DC allow early voting, but not New York.
- 30 states and DC permit or require no-excuse absentee balloting, but not New York.
- 15 states and DC offer same-day voter registration. New York requires voters to register 25 days before an election.
- 7 states and DC offer automatic voting registration, but not New York.

New York can save time and money. Reforming New York's archaic election system will make registering and casting a ballot faster and less costly for voters, the counties and the state.

- Early voting allows voters to cast a ballot at a time that is convenient for them and reduces traffic at polling places.
- Electronic poll books help voters get to the ballot box faster and reduce the cost of voting law compliance for county election boards.
- Later registration deadlines, and automatic and expanded online registration will relieve the burden on eligible voters and reduce the administrative costs of dealing with paper forms.

The NYCLU is mobilizing activists to contact lawmakers, participating in actions in Albany to demonstrate how important voting rights are, and working alongside a broad coalition of voting reform advocacy groups to amplify our message.

With the Trump regime committed to silencing voters, the time for meaningful, systemic reform in New York is now.

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